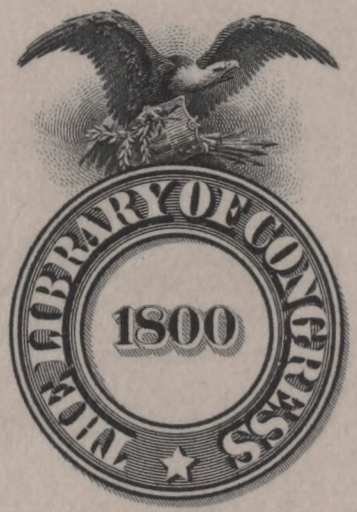
MEMOIRS of a

COW PONY



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SENORITA INEZ.— page 111.

MEMOIRS

OF A

COW PONY

AS TOLD BY HIMSELF.

ILLUSTRATED

BY
JOHN H. BURNS

BOSTON
EASTERN PUBLISHINC CO.

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TO GALLANT COW HORSE
AND HIS KNIGHTLY RIDER,
VANISHING TYPES OF A PICTURESQUE
AND STRENUOUS LIFE,
THIS VOLUME IS
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

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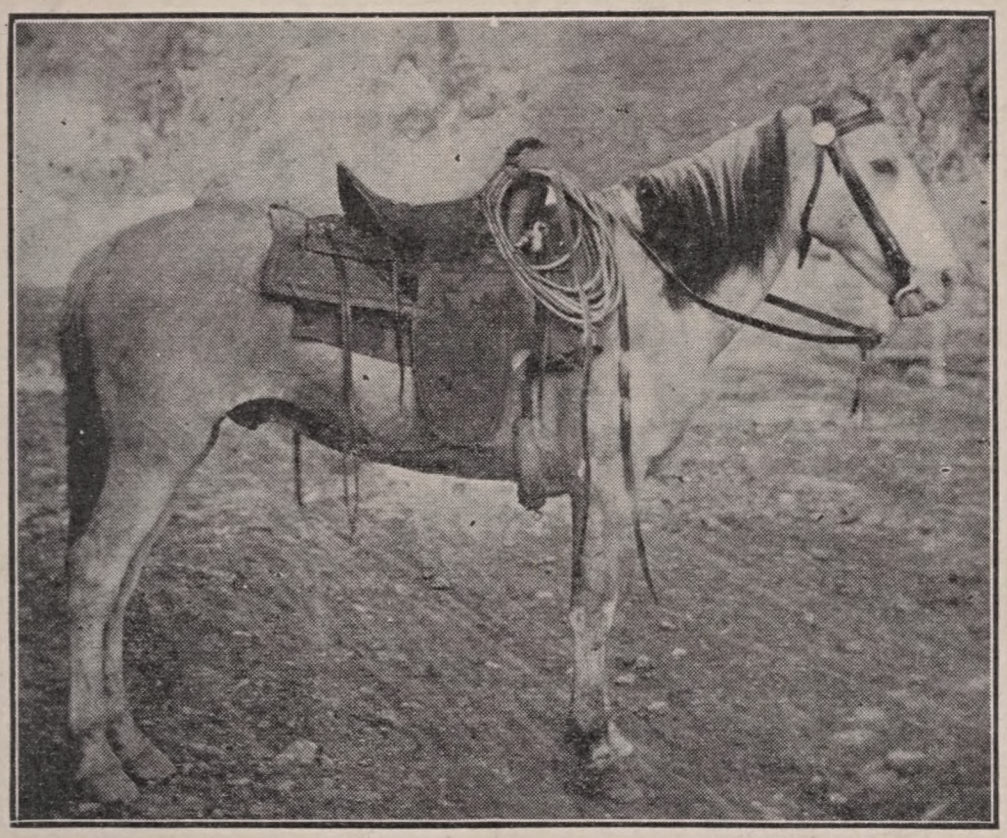


CHAPTER I.

Early Recollections.

I am just a common yellow cow pony. Since I was four years old I have been a saddler on the ranges of Texas, and the trails over which the vast herds of long-horned Texas and Mexican cattle are moved to the ranges of the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming. I am now owned by the TU brand; at least that is the last brand which has been burned on my hide.

My present master—and I want to say here that a kinder one I have never had—tells me that I have earned my retirement. By that, I guess he means I am not to be called upon to do much more hard work.

Many times my master has told me that if I would just give to the public my experiences in life, and my observations of ponies and men, it would be of great interest, and might be of benefit to ponykind, but I would answer to him that I had neither seen nor done anything worth recording.

"Just tell, Buck," he said, "from your pony viewpoint, what a cow pony and a cow boy should be, and how the former should be broken to work, also how he should be treated thereafter. Thus you may do to ponykind a great service."

I hesitated. There are incidents—one at least—in my life which I shrank from even thinking of, and to relate it to the world, I had not the courage.

Finally, one black night when I was carrying my master out of the Hay Creek brakes, he asked me again, and I yielded.

The moaning of the wind in the tops of the ragged, stunted pines told that a storm

was coming, and we hurried to reach level ground, but the double darkness of a stormy night smote us full in the face.

While we were still in the brakes, the trail, none too plain at the best, wound around the heads of yawning canons, down dangerously steep declivities, over and across obstructions, all requiring the utmost care on my part to avoid accident. Strange shapes of beasts, obscure and ghostly, scurried across our way, seeking the shelter of remoter regions. Whether these were the shapes of harmless or of those stronger and more savage animals which at times dragged down the strongest cattle on the range, we could not tell.

The snow swirled up out of the canons in strangling gusts. It struck and froze on the eye lashes and choked the nostrils.

Nose to the ground, mainly by the smell of the light trail, and its feel under my feet, I slowly worked out the problem, and when at length the ranch-house light flared in our faces, it was warmly welcomed by two thoroughly tired and chilled people, master and I.

Master was grateful to me for bringing

him safely home. His wet right hand sought my cold neck and stroked it.

"Buck, old faithful," he said, and there was a quiver in his voice, "you must tell me your life story, I will write it out, and we'll be partners in the deal."

I stopped stock still there in the storm and the night. Master let me stand, for he knew I was thinking. The past with all its lights and shadows unrolled itself before me in a flash, and I thought: "A pony who has lived through what I have, should have the courage to look the world in the face and tell the truth, and I will relate a true story of a common cow pony, a life such as many thousands have lived and are living to-day, and no incident will be set forth which has not actually occurred, for it must be a true record.

My earliest recollection is of blinding light and a gasping for breath. I was cold and shivery. My mother was standing over me. She fondled, petted and helped me to get upon my feet. When I had done this I was weak and trembly, and I think I was not very pretty to look at then. After mother had given me my first dinner I felt better, and the warm,

caressing Texas sun beat down upon and warmed me. Weak and wabbly as I was, I wanted to run and play, but when I tried to do this my mother ran with me and kept me off the rough and dangerous places, and coaxed me and led me up a hill onto a wide sweep of table land.

I was nothing but a little filmy-eyed baby pony; my legs too long for my body, and I would follow another as readily as I would my own mother. She had to watch me all the time to keep me from getting into trouble. Of course I was too young to appreciate the extreme beauty of the landscape, but from the standpoint of a pony, it was a paradise. As far as my eyes could reach was the billowy expanse of upland, with the grass shimmering and waving in the sunlight.

The whole landscape was dotted with ponies, idlers all. Some lay stretched out groaning in an excess of comfort and contentment, others grazed, some played, all were having the good time of their lives.

When I was four days old I felt that I was quite a horse, and I joined the other colts in their mild races and sports. Mother told me that now I could run as fast as I would be

able to at four years of age. It is many a wild race I ran at four years old, and it is a fact that my little soft yellow hoofs as a four-day-old could clip off a short quarter as fast as I have ever been able to do since.

Our range was the Staked plains of Texas. Over this we wandered as we would, with no care, nothing to do but eat, drink and frolic. That was a sweet summer; the responsibilities of life, its labors and sufferings were undreamed of by us youngsters.

Occasionally an old broken-down cow pony would come among us and we would laugh at and josh him shamefully. If I had my life to live over again, I would be kinder to those old fellows.

We had our little tragedies, it is true, during that first summer. Sometimes the great grey wolves would sweep the range. They came in packs, vicious, snarling, poisonous, hunting for us colts. Then there would be a mad rush of colts to a common center. We grew crazy with fear and crowded in behind and among our mothers, who fought for us and charged into the midst of the pack, biting and kicking, and pro-

tecting us at the risk of their own lives, until the dawn drove the coward brutes to cover. One strange thing I noticed was that if any colt was bitten, ever so slightly, the colt died, but a grown horse or a cow would recover from severe wounds.

That precious first summer passed, winter came; the grass dried up and blew away; icy cold winds beat upon us; snow storms swept the Mesa, and life became one continuous struggle for existence. We sought such natural shelter as we could find and there we would huddle together in piteous misery until the storm had passed. We grew thinner and thinner; many of my playmates and friends died. I, too, would have died but for the devotion of my mother.

Grass came again and I fattened. The memory of a pony colt is not a long memory, and soon I forgot the dangers and sufferings of the past winter and romped again with my fellows. Up to this time I had seen no animals save the wild beasts of the plains, long horned cattle, and my own kind. If I thought at all at this time, it was to think that the "Mesa" on which we ranged was all there

was of the world, that where the waving grass tops touched the sky was the end, and that we ponies owned it. We suffered the cattle to stay about there and scorned them all the time, simply because it was too much trouble to chase them away. As for the wild beasts, we tolerated them because we couldn't help it.

Finally, there came to me and my young friends a sudden and stern awakening to the fact that we did not own the world. One bright morning I was running a few races with some young friends, when we saw a most amazing sight. A dozen or more ponies, at a long easy canter were coming over the brow of the "Mesa," and on the back of each was a big, strange looking and homely thing. In wild affright we ran into the thickest of the herd. I hunted up mother and asked her what these things were.

"My son, those are cow boys," she answered.

"And what are cow boys, mother?"

"My son, cow boys are our masters. They are the masters of all things, and you must learn to like them."

The other and older ponies laughed at me, and said that I would soon find out.

The "cow boys," as mother called them, circled around us and gradually moved us toward a great round corral into which we were driven; then they made a great fire into which they put a lot of irons. Of course I did not know what all this meant, but I was soon to find out.

I hugged close to mother's side, scared and in fear that I was to be hurt. I was!

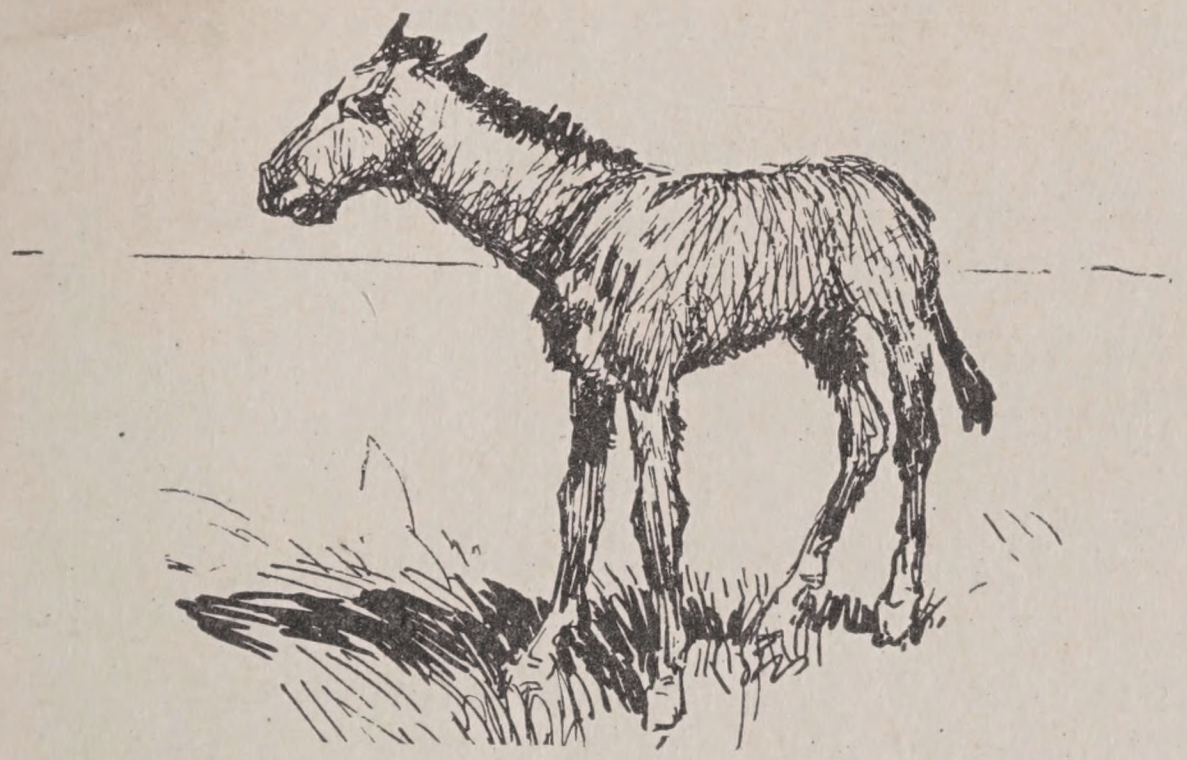
Soon the cow boys rode into the corral, swinging long ropes. I started to run across the corral, but one of them threw his rope, and although I jumped as high as I could to keep out of the way, he caught me by the forelegs and threw me to the ground. Then another jumped off his pony and ran up and sat down on my head. Still another ran in with one of the hot irons and burned upon my hide my first brand, which was the letters BXB. I thought they were burning my whole hip off, but they were not, and the pain was as nothing to what came after. The man who sat on my head kept me from seeing, holding me so tight that I could scarcely move. Then some one cut and mutilated me dreadfully. When they let me go I sprang to my

feet, dizzy and blind from pain; I staggered and fell, but they only laughed at me and struck me with a rope and said:

"Get out, Buck!"

This was the first time I had heard my name spoken. It was many weeks before I was well, and for a long time after this I thought that men were fiends who lived only to make life a burden, an agony, and a shame to ponies, but as I grew older, I found that there were a few men who are not so cruel.

My present master is all that a just, generous and considerate master should be.



CHAPTER II.

Old Baldy's Advice.

My second year was uneventful. I grew fast and became a leader among my companions; none could run faster than I, none could turn quicker. I saw a good deal of men that summer, for we were taken frequently to the same corral where I was branded, and on one occasion I heard a cow boy say:

"That buckskin is going to make a dandy cow pony."

I now knew what my fate was, and it made me pretty sad, for I noticed that the ponies

which they rode seemed always tired. Many of them were stiff and lame, broken down and thrown away long before they had reached old age. Their riders wore big, jangling spurs on their heels, and they were ever jabbing them into the sides of their ponies. I found out afterwards how that hurt.

Ponies, however, like folks, live mostly in the present, and I quickly forgot these unpleasant things, and was as happy as need be.

This summer was, in many respects, the happiest summer of my life. I was old enough to be considerable of a horse; I was no longer turned down by my elders as I had been up to this time, and I had the strength to fight for my rights.

The following winter was a good one and it quickly passed, and spring came again. I was now a three-year-old, and was a good deal larger than my mother. I was also fat and strong and mother was proud of my beauty and strength. This day she was quieter than usual; I saw that something troubled her, and when I asked her what it was, she said:

"My son, it is your future that troubles me. You are a horse now, a big, strong, fine horse;

your days of fun and freedom are almost over; you have been a good son to me, but I fear you are too much given to the use of your heels and teeth. Beware, my son, beware. Bosses are stronger than ponies."

That made me mad. The idea of one of those gangling, two-legged things being stronger than I. I sprang up trembling, and striking the tough sod one blow with my right fore hoof, which buried it up to the fetlock, said: "Stronger than I? Can a boss do that?"

I saw that mother was grieved at my anger and I laughed the subject off. A few days later my time came.

A dozen or more of the leanest, lankiest, toughest looking bosses I had yet seen rode up, at first quietly, among us. They pointed at this pony and at that one, then separated out a bunch of us and drove us into the corral and closed the huge gates so that we could not escape. They followed us into the corral, uncoiling as they did so the *riattas*, which hung at their saddle pommels.

I noticed that the ponies which they rode were small, bright-eyed, crisp-acting fellows

who seemed to take pleasure in their work. They rode about among us for some time talking of this and that one, but at length I heard one of them say:

"I believe I'll try that buskskin; he is big enough to go to work."

I knew that my time had come, as mother had told me, and I was scared stiff, my heart fluttering so that I could hardly breathe. One turned toward me, and I ran as fast as I could about the corral trying to hide from them.

It was no use. That rope came like a flash; dodge it I couldn't, and it dropped over my neck. I saw him hook the rope around the pommel of his saddle; I saw the little pony he was riding stop so quick that the dirt was cut by his hoofs from under his feet. Another jump, and I was at the end of the rope; my heels went into the air and I fell broadside. The shock of that fall was something awful. It knocked the breath out of my body and most broke my neck. I was not able to rise for some time, when I did I was blind. I was in no great pain, but I felt a numbness all over my body. I knew that I was alive and that my neck was broken; I expected to die. I was surprised that I was alive at all.

My head hung down to the ground and pointed off sideways and wabbled about; the sweat broke out on me and poured off in streams; then I heard some one say:

"Damme if I didn't kink his neck."

They took the rope off and drove me out of the corral onto the range, the man who hurt me, saying: "Well, better luck next time, Buck."

I grew thin and weak; I traveled in circles, always to the left, my head pointing off in that direction. It was hard for me to eat or drink, and I feel sure that I should have died but for my mother, who came down and stayed with me until I was able to rejoin the herd. It was mid-winter before I could again get my head up where I wanted to carry it, straight to the front.

Had that winter not been a mild one I should have died. Spring came that year early, bright and warm. I took on flesh rapidly and was soon again a rollicky, fun-loving pony, ready for a fight or a race, but mother, good soul, was still troubled for my future. She said:

"You are a four-year-old now, and they will

surely catch you again. They always 'break' ponies at four years of age."

I replied: "But, mother, they kinked my neck once, and they ought to be satisfied."

"No, no, my son, they will want you to pack a boss on your back; you will have to do it. When you are caught again don't run against the rope, stop quick, and do what they want you to."

I had not much sense in those days, I mean boss sense, but I knew they didn't go at it right and it made me mad. I said to mother:

"Mother, I can't stand it; I'll fight them. If they would be nice to me, I'd be nice to them, but they wont."

She was a dear, wise old mother, and I now know that her advice was good. She replied:

"Bucky, dear, don't fight; you'll get the worst of it. You are a big, strong pony. You can do the work easily, and it will be so much better."

Well, I promised her that I would, and I tried faithfully, but it was no use.

There was in our herd a bay pony with a bald face and four white stockings. He must have been a great beauty at some time, in fact,

he was still handsome. I heard the bosses say that there was good blood in that pony, even if he was a broncho.

His coat was as shiny as silver. He had big, clear, beautiful brown eyes and wide open flexible nostrils. We called him "Old Baldy." He had a big reputation among us for wisdom, and we often referred our disputes to him for settlement. When the poor, old fellow tried to run, it was laughable to see the way he fell to pieces. You see he had been a great cow horse in his younger days, and had been abused by cruel and thoughtless riders, until now, when he should have been just in his prime, he was broken down and stiff in every joint. On his knees were unsightly bunches; scars marred the satiny coat, and it made me very sad to see him, for I thought "such will be my fate."

Old Baldy was of no account any more, but we respected him for what he had been and for his kindness and wisdom. To this faithful and wise old fellow, mother took me for a good talk, and we three went to the top of a knoll where the breeze swept the flies and mosquitos away, and there we were alone.

There were really four of us, for mother now had by her side another colt, but it was a little frail filly colt, and I didn't count it.

We went over the whole subject of "breaking." Baldy was quiet and thoughtful, but when urged by mother, said:

"I have been through the whole business; I have seen thousands of ponies broken; it is a very, very bad business for the ponies, but after all my experience and observation, I am satisfied that the best way is to submit and be a good pony, and do just as the cow boys want us to do."

Now, what could a pony do when his mother and Baldy talked to him in that way, but give his promise? I gave my word of honor, and I faithfully intended to keep it. Why shouldn't a pony's honor be kept as bright as that of a boss? Then we touched noses and separated.

I went off where I saw some strange ponies quarrelling with some friends of mine; I mixed in and chased them off the range, while Baldy laid down to rest his poor old bones, and mother gave her baby colt some dinner.

When I returned, Baldy called me up onto a hill for a private talk. He said:

"Buck, it is a good rule to be always a good pony, and do promptly and cheerfully all that is required of you, but you may be abused beyond endurance; you may fall into the hands of a man who will try to break your jaw or cut your tongue off with the bridle bit and cut your sides open with the rowels." He showed me his tongue, which was half cut off, and bade me rub my nose along the ridges on his sides and flanks where he had been torn by the cruel and unnecessary use of spurs. He continued:

"If you ever fall into the hands of such a monster you should buck him off."

He explained to me all the best methods of bucking, such as bucking down hill, or into a water or mud hole. He said that a very effectual buck was to pitch as high as possible into the air and land with ends reversed. If none of these approved methods were effectual, and probably they would not be, I should try falling on my side; I might catch something, perhaps a leg or an arm underneath me, and break it. If, however, I did not succeed,

there was one final effort I should make which would, he felt sure, do the business.

While telling this the old fellow's eyes gleamed and his voice sank to a whisper. He said that not many ponies knew how to do it, and fewer still had the required courage, strength and agility. He felt sure, however, that I had all these. He said:

"When the proper moment comes, do the act promptly, with energy, and without mercy. You must not be exhausted or out of breath, or you will fail. Catch your rider unawares; lead him to think that you are just a common dull bucker. To do this, you may rear up, kick and plunge about until he becomes careless and confident of his seat; then pitch straight away, not too hard, and then with a supreme effort, spring high in the air and come down square on your back. If you do it quickly enough and with sufficient energy, you will feel something soft under you and you may hear the sound of crushing bones as the pommel of your saddle is driven into stomach or chest."

He gave me all the details of the operation, and I took it all in. I was amazed at the cold-

blooded proposition. As he told me this, his voice, eye, ear, thin quavering nostrils and distended veins, all told of the invincible spirit imprisoned within the scarred and crippled old body.

Of course I never thought that I would be called upon to try this tragical method of getting rid of a cruel master, yet his talk made me very sober. During the next few days I thought constantly upon what he had told me, but never for a moment did I think of violating my solemn promise to mother.

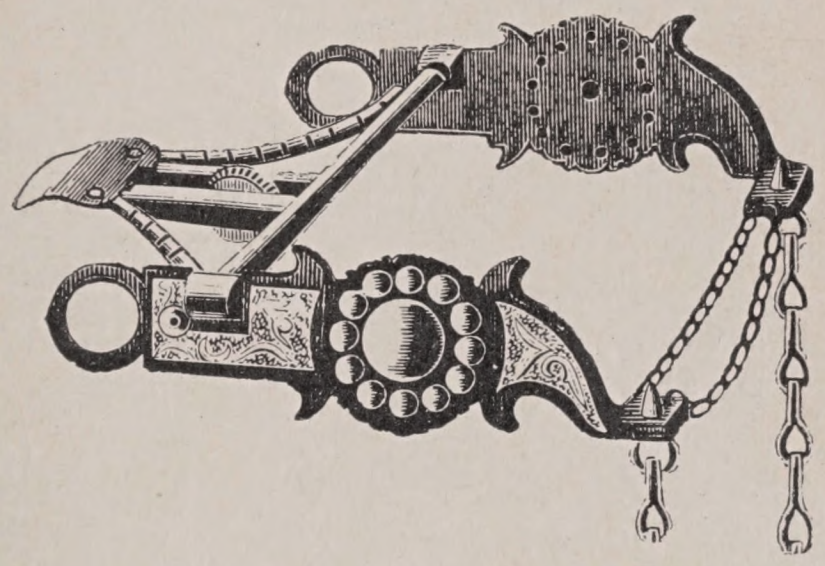
I know that this is a ragged chapter in my history and I hestitate to tell it, but I said I would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and so, I here acknowledge that I got old Baldy to go with me down into a deep coulee, out of sight of all the other ponies, and give me a few private lessons in the art of self defense along the lines indicated by him.

"To be bossed, Buck, is our fate,—a hard fate it is for all us ponies,—but there are some kind people in the world; I have known several. Sometimes one of these becomes a cow boy. Be good and gentle, Buck, it is

best. I have played the game of life. The final round up for your Uncle Baldy is almost here (a tear trickled down his cheek). My young friend, I pray that you will fare in the game better than I."

Mother had come up and was crying. The whole conversation made me tired, then mother chipped in again:

"Now, my son, you have heard what Uncle Baldy says; promise me to be good and not fight or make trouble."



CHAPTER III.

Death of Mexican Pete.

Not long after Baldy had finished me off in his private school, as I have related, several hundred of us were corralled, and an even hundred miles and again coralled and branded. remainder being thrown back on the range. We were then driven rapidly south about a hundred miles and again coralled and branded. This time we were not thrown but were driven one at a time into a narrow lane called a "branding shoot."

This was just wide enough for one pony to squeeze in, and, once in, bars were put up before and behind him so that he could

neither go forward nor backward; then the sides of the shoot, which were hinged, were pressed against his sides until it seemed his bones were being crushed and the breath thoroughly squeezed out of his body. While held thus, unable to move, and scarcely able to breathe, the branding iron was applied. In our case the first thing done was to run a straight bar like this ——— through the B X B and then the new brand was burned on.

The new brand which was now burned on us was called a cross-anchor. As my hip already bore the B X B brand, the new one was put on the thigh. We knew from this that we had been sold to the "Cross-anchor" people, and that they were marking us so that they might know us wherever we might be.

They did not buy us as an investment; they at once began breaking us. They said that a pony was of no account unless he was broken and taught to do their work; that we ought to be philosophical enough to take breaking and the consequent work as a part of life.

I wish to say right here that it is not to breaking, in a reasonable manner, nor to legitimate work that I object, nor have I talked with many ponies who did, but it is to brutal and thoughtless breaking, and excessive and unnecessary work that we object. The fact is that most ponies after they are broken rightly, and are handled by kind and thoughtful masters, like to work for them. Any observing cow boy will tell you that most ponies are, or seem to be, eager to work, that their eyes gleam and that they show every evidence of pleasure at a stiff piece of work, well done. I know that that is the case with myself and many of my friends.

On the big ranches the men who break the ponies are a different lot from the straight cowboys. Often they are hired for the sole purpose of breaking, and they travel from ranch to ranch in their business, sometimes being paid so much per head, and sometimes they get a certain percentage of the horses broken. They are called "*Buccarios*" or busters. I never liked the word "buster."

It was a gang of five men who took us in hand, and they were not a bad looking lot, with one exception. Three of the five were long, slim, laughing, apparently good natured fellows; the fourth was a small, lithe fellow, who had a soft, smooth, even voice, and he worked slowly and with gentleness. He was the best one of the lot, and I noticed that he had the least trouble of any of them with his ponies. The fifth—and here I try to speak without malice or prejudice—was a hard looking lot. He was a big, stout, loud-mouthed, swaggering fellow, who, when not swearing at some of us, was rolling cigarettes, and I took him for a Mexican negro.

I knew that the ponies who fell to him would have trouble, and I did my best to avoid him; often I placing myself in front of the little fellow, who I thought was the best one, but I suppose he did not know what I wanted, for he would not catch me. Several times I dodged the rope of Mex, for that is what the others called the negro, but at last he caught me.

I was standing away over in the middle

BUCCARIOS PRACTISING WITH THE LARIAT.

of the bunch, but I guess that my head must have been up too high, for so swift that I could not see it coming, over the heads of dozens of ponies, came his rope, landing about my neck.

I remembered how my neck had been broken by running up against a rope, so I made no attempt to run away, and when he pulled, which he did in no gentle manner, I walked straight up to him.

I was determined to have no trouble with him, and I prayed that he would be as good as I and try to have no trouble with me; if he had only done this the end would have been so different.

I stood pretty quiet while he put on my bridle, though he was awfully rough about it. The bridle bit was what is known as a spade bit; I suppose it is called so because of a long steel plate, shaped like a spade, that runs up into the mouth of the pony.

They are a cruel contrivance; when the reins are pulled the spade raises up against the roof of the pony's mouth, and if the reins are jerked, it flies up and tears the roof so that it bleeds. I saw one fine pony

bleed to death by a cut received in this manner.

Well, he forced this awful bit into my mouth, as I say, in a very rough manner; I stood still, however. He then dragged up his immense saddle; my, but it was a heavy saddle! He slammed it down on my back as though I was an old working pony, frightening me so that I capered around a good deal, though did nothing, I am sure, very bad. He then cinched that saddle, and I never thought that anything could pinch me as that cinch did. When he got through I could scarcely breathe. Now, there I was, with a running noose about my neck, which was drawn uncomfortably tight; with that terrible bit in my mouth; a fifty pound saddle on my back cinched so tight that I felt I must surely die of it.

Do you wonder that I thought I should fall in my tracks with pain and fright? Do you not think that I was entitled to gentle treatment, and a few kind and assuring words? Did I get them? Not at all, any more than do the vast majority of ponies while being broken. Through it all I had

no thought of being mean; I kept thinking of what I had promised mother.

I was determined that come what would, I would carry him quietly and as strong as I could, so that he would be good to me. This, however, is what he did.

He tied the bridle reins to the lariet, which was still about my neck, so that when he jerked the rope he jerked the reins; he then took the end of the lariet and began beating me over the hips and legs. What he was doing it for I am sure I don't know, for I had done nothing wrong. When I would start to run away he would jerk the rope, and soon had my mouth bleeding and the sweat pouring from me.

This was bad enough but worse was coming. He struck me in the face with his old sombrero and hurt my eye. He cussed and swore at me, calling me all the vile names I had ever heard and many more. He said:

"Why don't you buck, you yellow devil?" Still I wouldn't buck.

"Damn you, I'll make you!"

With that he mounted me, and I at once walked off quietly, as I thought, though of

course I was trembly and shied. I had gone but a few steps when he jerked me up short, cutting my mouth so that the blood dripped from my lips. I stood still, trembling with fright, not knowing what would come next, but I soon found out. He struck me in the flanks with the spurs, then on the sides and shoulders and neck, even up to my ears. Every time he struck me, it cut the skin and flesh.

I was soon bleeding all along my sides and neck. I plunged about as best I could, of course, but it did no good. I tried to stop and tell him I would do what he wanted me to, but every time I stopped he grew worse. I thought he was killing me.

I thought, "Why should I tamely submit to torture, mutilation, and death at the hands of this man whom I have never even thought of harming?"

Like a flash there came to me the words of Old Baldy there in the coulee:

"If ever you fall into the hands of such a monster (such an one as Mex), pitch him off if possible; if you cannot, there is one

final effort you must make, which I feel sure will prove tragically effective."

Every detail of the process, as Baldy showed it to me stood out before me there in the corral, with sudden and startling distinctness. I no longer felt the pain of quirt and spur, of cinch and bleeding mouth. I no longer heard his volleying curses; I was a savage, pure, simple, cold!

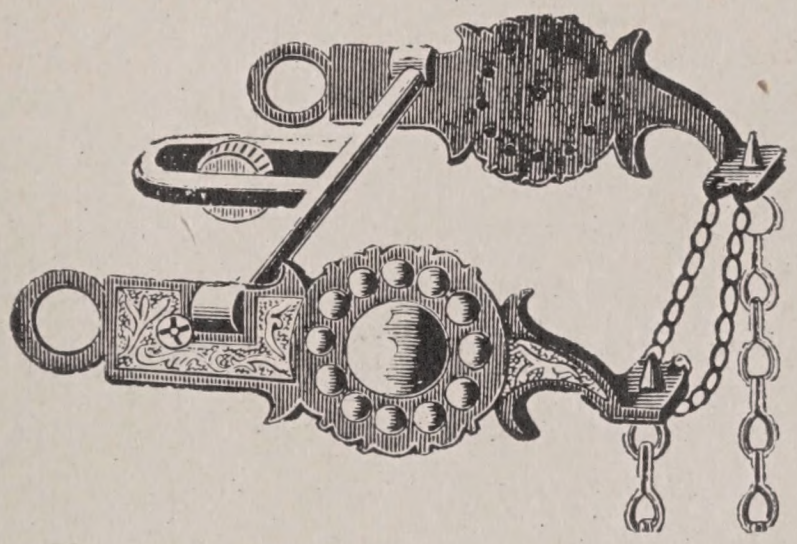
My one thought was to kill, kill, kill! the brute who was torturing me. I knew that I could not throw him off, and even if I did, it would do no good, as he would wear me out. I knew if I was to crush him underneath me, I must first throw him off his guard, and then, the one mighty effort which Uncle Baldy had told me.

I pitched gently away, straight across the dusty corral, until I felt he was grown careless and I felt the grip of his knees relax, then I sprang as high as I could straight into the air, turned half over and came down on my back, utterly reckless of the consequences to myself.

I heard a soft crushing sound beneath me,

and, scrambling to my feet, knew that my work was well done.

They carried Mex out of the corral. The next morning, underneath a giant elm which stood there on the brink of the canon, he was buried. After this they called me "Buck, the Man-Killer," though in truth, I was but an ignorant pony, who wanted a chance to do what was right and be useful.



CHAPTER IV.

How Buck Became a Cow Pony.

At last ninety-nine of the hundred ponies were declared broken and ready for work. I had not been caught since I had earned the title of "Man-killer"; all seemed to shun me. and I was, in truth, entirely willing that they should. I was having an easy time.

Mid-summer came; autumn followed fast, and the great autumnal beef round up was on. All the cattle on the great ranges were gathered together or rounded up into bunches, and the full grown or ripe steers were separated or cut out and driven to the railroads for shipment to market.

I do not intend to describe the labor and excitements of a round up. I am telling my individual experiences only. I, not being broken, was an idler. Regularly every morning I was driven into the rope corral with the others, but no one wanted to try a pony with the record I had made. They must have become tired of seeing me idling about though, for one morning when the men were catching the horses for the day's work, the foreman said:

"That buckskin must be rode. Phil, suppose you try him."

"All right, sir," answered Phil.

I was standing away out in the middle of the close bunch, and again over the backs of a dozen or more horses, whiz, came a rawhide riatta which lodged square about my neck. I was led out, frightened and nervous, for I did not know what manner of man Phil might be. However, I kept cool and followed him out onto the prairie. He was a small, blue eyed man, and when he spoke to me, saying:

"Well, Buck, are you going to be a bad pony to-day?" I found that he had a low,

soothing voice. This made me less afraid.

He gently stroked my neck and muzzle. He told the others to keep away, that he would handle me without help. He then slipped the bridle bit ever so gently into my mouth and put the headstall over my head, not hurting me in the least.

His bridle bit, while pretty severe, was nothing like that villainous spade bit of Old Mex. Phil called it a half-breed bit, I suppose because it was about half way between a spade and a common driving bit. He now led me about for a good while, all the time talking soothingly to me and telling me that he was not going to hurt me and that we would be good friends. He then let me smell of the saddle blanket. I suppose that he wanted me to know that it was nothing dangerous. I didn't smell anything on it but pony, and he rubbed it all over my neck and head, then over my back and legs. He did all this so gently and slowly that there was no chance or cause to be frightened, and I wasn't.

He then placed the blanket in place on my back, still continuing to talk to me kindly.

Then he made me smell of the saddle; it too smelled of nothing but pony. Now he gently and slowly laid the saddle on my back; I think he was afraid that I would kick him, for when he wanted the cinch he reached through under my belly with a stick, rather than his hand, to get it. He cinched me up good and tight, but not so tight as to crush me. He then led me about, nor did he whip or abuse me in any manner.

I was very grateful to him for all his kindness. I only wanted to know what he wanted me to do, and I stood ready to do it. Fianlly he coiled up his rope, one end of which was about my neck, and ran the loose end through the curb strap of my bridle, then he was ready to mount me.

I never saw a cow outfit that had not some smart Aleck in it, and this one was no exception. It was the cook this time, and to show his wit he called out:

"Whar' you goin' to fall, Phil? We'll gather up the pieces."

The other cow boys sat upon their horses expecting to see Phil have trouble with me, and at the cook's sally they burst into a great

fit of laughter. Neither Phil nor I thought it a bit funny.

Phil now took his coiled rope in his left hand, and with the same hand took hold of the cheek strap of my bridle and drew my head well around toward his hip. He then grasped the pommel with his right hand and slowly raised himself into the saddle. I stood perfectly still.

"All right, boys, go ahead," said Phil.

With creaking of saddle leather and jingling of bridle chains and rowels, the dozen or more cow boys tolled off for his circle swung away at a good swift canter, I following as best I could.

I am aware that I did no good as far as work was concerned, but Phil was patient with me and I learned a whole lot of things. I learned that "get there" was the law of the range, and I learned that a pony who could not "get there," quick, was no good. I resolved that if I lived I'd not take a back seat for any horse in the outfit. In one thing I am sure I beat them all, and that was in getting in everybody's way. Tired? Well, I guess I was, and when the saddle

was taken off that evening, I just quietly crawled away and laid down. Every bone in my body ached.

The other ponies just laughed at and made fun of me; while I lay groaning in agony they took a good roll in the fragrant grass and wandered away grazing.

The next day I felt better, and at the end of six days I was ready for work again. I believe that I did pretty good work this time, at least Phil said I did for a "green-horn," whatever that is.

After this I took my regular turns, coming on for a day's work about once a week, and finally it came to be pretty easy for me. After the round-up I went with the beef to the railroad, and there for the first time I saw an engine. I have to laugh even now when I think what a spectacle I made of both Phil and myself. The cattle had been left back where the grass was good. A number of the punchers rode up to the big loading pens, Phil and I among them. We stood close to the track when the big, roaring monster came past us, and it was a terrible sight to a pony who had never before been

off the range. It was an awful trial to stand there and see it coming. It was as big as all of us ponies put together; roared loud enough to make a pony deaf, and breathed breaths as big and white as clouds. I stood there ready to fall down, or to run away, and expected to be killed.

Phil was sitting in the saddle laughing and talking, not thinking that I had reached the point where I was ready to do something desperate. I stood it, however, until the engine whistled; I had never heard such an awful blood curdling noise before, and instantly all my brave resolutions vanished and I concluded that it was time for me to bolt. Bolt I did.

I did not give anybody notice that I was going to, but just flew so quick that I left Phil sprawling there in the sand, then I made tracks as fast as I could for camp, and as I raced through the sage brush and cactus I heard a roar of laughter behind me, then there was a chorus of those awful whistles again. I heard a voice call out: "Go it, Buck, or I'll git ye."

I had no time to look back. I expected every

moment to be murdered in cold blood, and I reached camp as weak as a sick cat, thoroughly winded, and my feet full of cactus thorns.

I expected to have trouble with Phil over my conduct, but he did look sheepish when he came after me and rode me back. He was a gentleman though, that man Phil was, for he didn't blame me, and said: "The durned thing skeert me, too," also, "that he intended now to introjuce me to the bulljine," that is what he called it, "regular." He did it.

He made me walk right up to it. It was hot and greasy. He rubbed my nose against it. It was hotter than any desert sand I ever nosed, and I have never been able to get entirely over the fright I had that day.

After the beef had been shipped we were taken back to the range and turned loose. I did no more work that winter, save the strenuous work which it required to live. That winter was the worst ever known in the Pan-Handle country.

"PHIL SPRAWLING THERE ON THE SAND."— page 47.

CHAPTER V.

One Awful Night.

In November it began raining, and gradually grew colder and colder still, until the rain froze as it fell and everything was covered. The summer had been very dry and the grass was short. When what little there was became coated with ice, to get enough to keep alive became a problem, a problem too deep for thousands of ponies and scores of thousands of cattle to solve.

We ponies stood it better than the cattle. We could paw the snow and ice off and get a taste of what little grass there was. But

those poor cattle, with their homely split hoofs, couldn't paw as we could.

We wandered everywhere on the range hunting for feed, but it was ice on the grass here and ice on the grass there, a "norther" to-day and a norther to-morrow. It seemed that none of us would live until spring.

If it had not been for the cattle we would have fared better, but as soon as we would get a patch of grass pawed off so that we could get a nibble, the poor starving creatures would come crowding in on us, taking a mean advantage of our industry by eating what we had dug up, for in their misery they no longer feared us. We would then move on, and so they followed us about from place to place, dying, always dying. I guess that they were better off dead, though, for they would have been killed and eaten in the end anyway.

I shall never forget one awful night. There were many nights of horror, and days too, that dreadful winter, but one in particular will haunt me to the end of my trail.

It was a clear night, but a muggy one, the air was blue and thick, so that a pony

could not see his body's length. It was thick with a deadly chill, so full of frost that it choked in the nostrils and chilled the lungs; it festooned on the eyelashes so that we were blind.

To stand still meant death, so we travelled, staggered rather, slowly and blindly forward, we knew not where, anywhere for movement, for life, to escape that deadly, blighting blast of death out of the northland. The strongest of us were in front. Behind came a long ever stiffening procession of weaker ones, and weaker still. Following these was a vast body of cattle, the bulls and steers in the van, then the cows and calves, mother cows and baby calves, following.

We traveled thus blindly on until we came to the edge of the *mesa,* to the brakes of the Cimaron. It was a rough region, full of yawning canoñs, dangerous even by day, but a veritable hell, at night, in a blizzard.

There was no odor in the air, no ray of kindly light found its way through the frost closed eyelids to warn us that a miserable death lay there at our feet. All unwarned and unheeding over the brink of a precipice, down into a rocky gorge we fell! I fell on

top of others, rolled off, scrambled to my feet and limped away.

For long dark hours I heard the crush of bones, the groans of mangled and dying ponies, the whinnying of mothers and the feeble answering cry of the colts. I heard the rattle and breaking of horns, the groaning and bawling of cows and calves, and this long drawn-out and horrible nightmare lasted until the pale, cold sun broke dimly on the scene. It was ashamed to shed its pure rays upon so sad a scene.

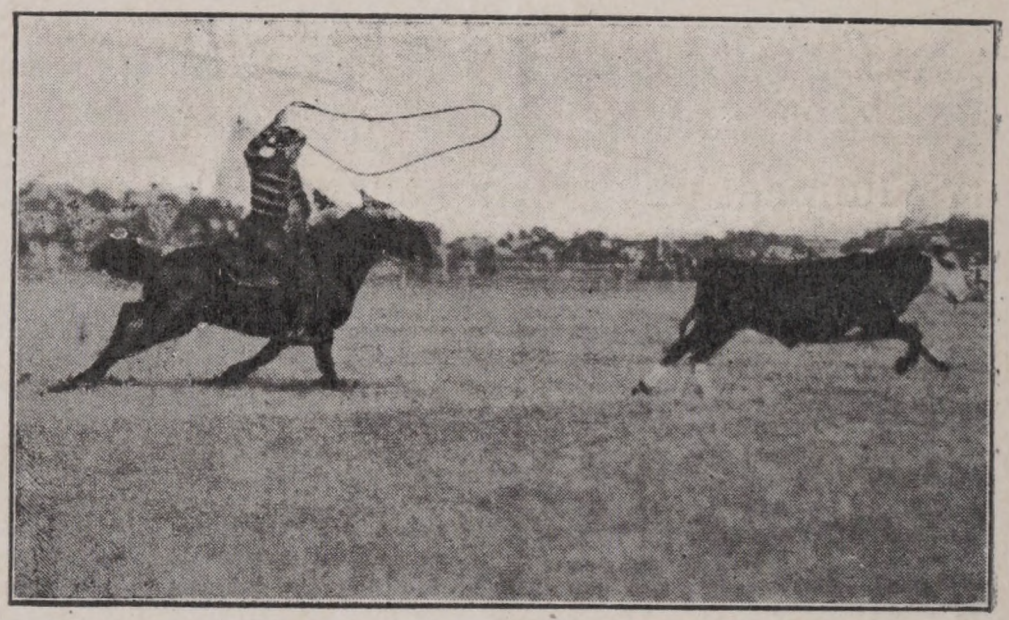
The entire canon was filled with the mangled remains of the dead. The ponies were buried under the avalanche of cattle, and so full was the chasm that a careful and strong pony could have walked across upon the yielding forms. Hundreds of ponies, crippled and mangled, stood or lay about. A frosty mist, fresh and salty smelling, like fresh blood, arose from the mass. Ice, red ice, formed about them. Some had broken legs, others eyes gouged out, from others the entrails protruded, while from the whole went up a subdued and pitiful moaning.

As fast as my stiff and sprained limbs permitted, I fled from the awful sights and

sounds, and sought other pastures. As I slowly limped my way across the *mesa,* across which we had drifted the night before, I saw a number of men and teams at work cutting and raking up the cacti which grows everywhere in that region. The sight was like that of a great hay field in the Dakotas and puzzled my poor benumbed brain no little, but while I was wondering what it all meant, fires were kindled in the long winrows of cactus, and the burning piles were raked and hauled over by the men, and finally raked out again and scattered.

Then the lean and hungry cattle were driven up, and behold! the mystery was solved. They were feeding the starving brutes. They had been burning the thorns off the cacti so that they might be eaten, and the long-horns seemed willing enough to do this. They fought one another, each striving to get the most of the unsavory stuff. I tried it; it was better than nothing, but after one good fill, I left the field to the cattle, and did not try it again.

I have heard it said that it saved the lives of thousands of heads of cattle.



CHAPTER VI.

Adios Granny.

Another Spring came. The grass grew quickly, and soon I was round, plump and rollicking again. I have always tried to look on the bright side of life. If I have an ugly rider, one who abused me, I tried to think that he may die, and the next one may be better. In the midst of the most heart-breaking work, or the dreariest winter, I tried to brave it out, thinking that spring and change will soon be here and it may be for the better, and I think that this is the true philosophy for both men and ponies.

The spring brought a complete change for me. The cattle company which owned me (it was a Chicago corporation), they said, had lost so many cattle and ponies that winter that they grew discouraged with the business and sold out, so as soon as we were in good condition we were rounded up and turned over to an outfit of strange cow boys and moved south. I noticed that many of the new outfit had brown skins and spoke Spanish, of which I didn't understand a word.

I did, however, understand the language of the rowels and the quirt, and I knew the duties of a cow pony, so I got along pretty well.

We now belonged to a big outfit which owned cattle scattered over hundreds of miles of range. It was said that the company had upon this range more than one hundred thousand cattle under a brand denoted by a large circle with a smaller one in the center. It required hundreds of men and thousands of ponies to work the range. To-day, it was our work to turn back upon their own range a drift of wandering cattle; to-morrow they must be bunched at this or

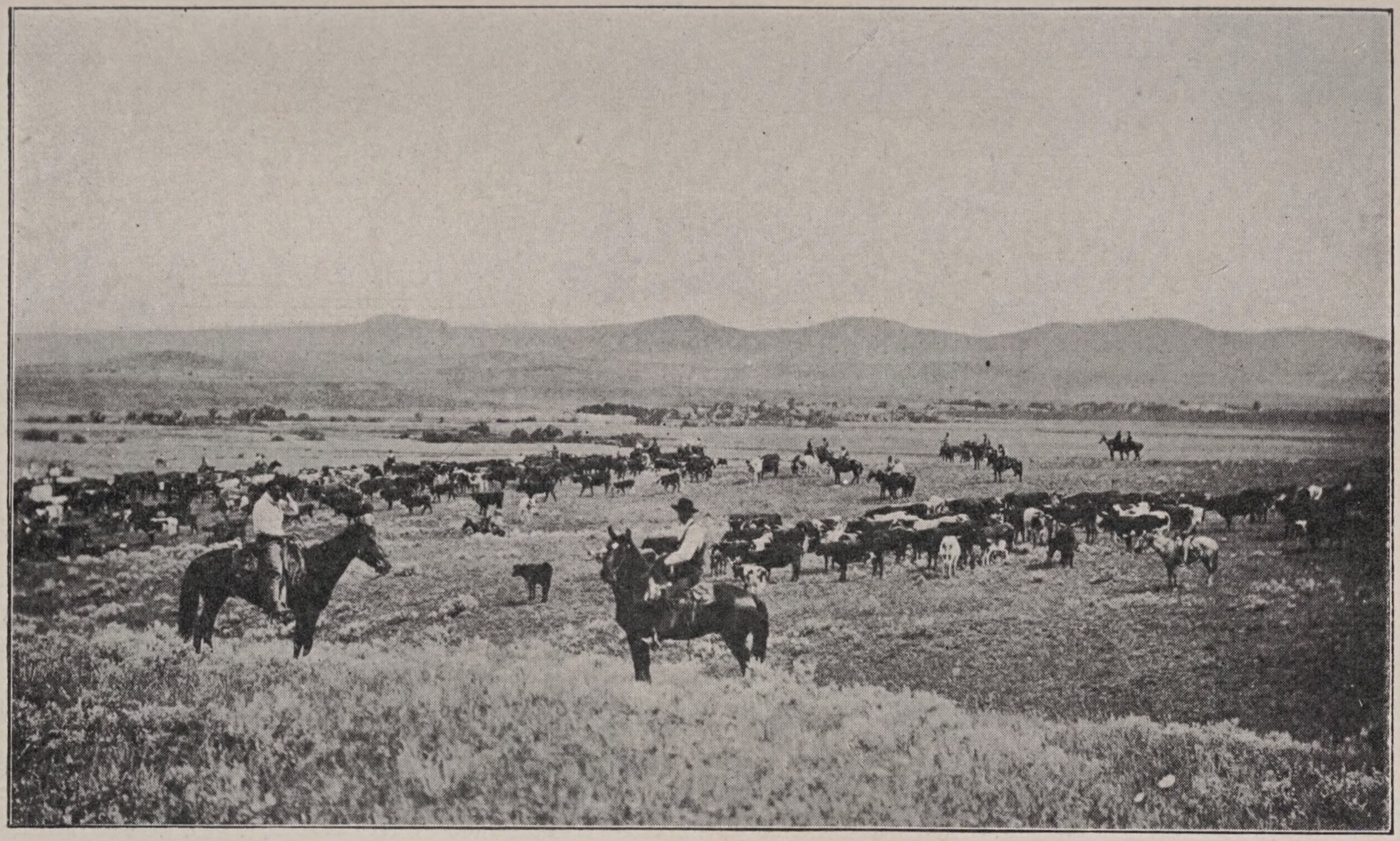
that water hole, and again scattered to points where the feed was fresher and better.

All of this made much hard work for men and horses. Then there was the never-ending round-up and the cutting out and branding. Beyond this, which is all that faithful cow ponies ought to be called upon to do, was the fool's work, which the cow boys, or some of them, were always imposing upon us.

If I were a foreman, I would not allow the cow boys to ride the ponies to their own and the ponies' ruin, for nothing but to get drunk or bask in the smiles of brazen and shameless women.

It was many a long trip I made that summer to a great adobe resort on the banks of the Rio Grande, sixty-five long, hot, dusty miles, for no other purpose than that my rider might get drunk and squander his hard-earned pay on the dusky senoritas, who smiled and smiled upon him, until his last *peseta* was gone. After that it was "*Vamoose*," or the bullet of *senor* or the stiletto of *senorita*.

This summer I was in the string of a big loose jointed youth called Joe. He may have



THE NEVER ENDING ROUNDUP.

had another name, but I think not. I never heard him called anything but just "Joe." He was the most peculiar and mysterious fellow I ever met, and I think none of his mates knew any more about him than I, none of them knowing who he was or where he came from, for he was not disposed to tell them. Any attempt to find out from him was resented so emphatically that the enquirer was not at all likely to try it again. He was rough, and tough in every direction; the best cow boy I ever knew, and the best boss, save my present master. He was always gentle, thoughtful, and considerate of my feelings, and I know he liked me, and I liked him; in truth, everybody liked him. At times he was a veritable terror. On foot he shambled in his gait and wabbled about, but the instant he threw his leg over the cantle, he was transformed into the most graceful rider in Texas, sitting as straight and tense as though moulded out of flexible marble.

Joe was always ragged, and after a hard round-up his clothes were just simply ready to fall off, all except his boots. No matter what the work or weather, on foot or mounted,

rain, snow or shine, in the corral or on the trail, he always wore the finest and handsomest boots I have ever seen. Where they came from nobody knew, but he always had them. He paid, so I heard it said, twenty-five dollars a pair.

I never knew Joe to be cold, hungry or tired, and he had no use for anyone who was. He was the handiest man on the range with a six-shooter, and when he went wild, which he did after each pay day, they all treated him as though he owned the ranch, and let him have his own way. He accepted this treatment as though entitled to it.

Not only was he the best shot on the range, but he was said to be the best man with a rope in Texas. There was not one in the outfit but would gamble even his saddle, that Joe could lassoo a jack rabbit, and he could do it too. He had medals and prizes won in shooting and roping contests which he valued more than he did his old clothes. He gave them away to anyone who wanted them.

He was also the swearingest man I ever carried, and I have carried some bad ones in

my day. About everything he said was preceded by a string of oaths.

I have said that he liked me and I know he did, but he had the strangest ways of showing it. He knocked me about scandalous, and swore at me outrageously. He often told me I wasn't worth a damn, and that if he owned me he'd shoot my d—— head off. I knew he didn't mean a word of it though, because many a time when I knew he must have been dead tired, he would walk and lead me over the rough places so that I might rest. All the time cussing me for a worthless, lazy, old devil, who wasn't worth killing, and yet, when camp was reached, he would lift the saddle off my back carefully and gently and examine to see if it was blistered and often he bathed my back with cold water to draw out the fever. When he would finally turn me loose though, he generally gave another good cussing.

I liked Joe. Why? Well, perhaps it was because there was good leather in him, for I always did like that in a boss. I mean by that that Joe never grumbled nor complained, no matter what the provocation. If the weather

was bad, the grub poor and scant, and the cattle hard to hold, then it was that Joe laughed the louder and worked the harder. Fear and Joe were strangers. If an old bull or a testy heifer went on a rampage and tried to run the outfit, Joe would mount the obstreperous brute and ride it until it gave up and behaved.

Between the calf round-up in the early summer and the beef round-up in the autumn should be a period of rest for ponies and men. But this did not suit Joe; anything like rest or inactivity always did make a fool of him, as it seemed to me.

He heard that beyond the Rio Grande River, forty or fifty miles away, there was being held a grand Mexican Holiday festival, and Joe determined to attend. There was a good deal of wrangling between him and the range foreman over the matter, but in the end, as usual, Joe won out. No pony would do for Joe but Buck, and one evening after supper, he saddled me and we started, and the next morning we were in the midst of the hilarious festivities. There was gathered for the affair thousands of Mexican men and women,

Mexican Indians of strange tribes, Navajo and Apache Indians from our side of the river and countless papooses of all these people, whose principal occupation and delight was as it seemed to me, to get in every pony's way.

Joe was happy. He danced with the dancers, and jollied the women scandously; he fought with the men, and won their silver at chuck-a-luck and monte; he petted and packed the kids about as though they were fully clothed and his own; he emptied his pockets of the silver which he had won from their fathers into the little dirty hands, and said the affair was "a jolly good picnic." He beat all comers at rifle and pistol shooting, and proposed to enter into the steer-roping contests, but they had seen enough of Joe's genius for winning, and they promptly barred him from further competitions. Now Joe was not one to tamely submit to being barred from this, the principal event, without protest. He rode me out in front of the judges' stand and gave them a talk; sitting there on my back, sombrero in hand, he made those five judges a regular speech; and he

could do it too, as he said, "to the queen's taste." He said:

"Senors:—I have ridden far and fast in order that I might take part in the festivities of this glorious occasion; I am here representing the Great American Eagle; I want you to listen to the noble bird scream. I rely on your well-known generosity and courtesy. I ask for a chance, and for a square deal; to deny me these would be a national shame and a disgrace. Your great neighbor on the other side of the Rio would feel hurt if their representative should be turned down by you; don't do it, Senors, don't do it. Give Buck and me," and right here he stroked my neck, "a run for our money, and we'll show you a few things that'll open your eyes."

He then slung a lot of talk that neither they nor I understood, and it just made me laugh to hear him; it was better than a circus. He said he "didn't care a cuss for their old prize, but he wanted the fun of skinning those dammed Greasers." The judges, however, stuck to their ruling that he should not enter the contest, and ordered him to fall back out of the way, so he gave them a final verbal vol-

ley and turned about to leave. While Joe had been wrangling with the judges, a party of American men and women had come up, perhaps a dozen of them, and as we turned we met them face to face. One, a tall gray-mustached gentleman, laid his arm on my mane and said to Joe:

"And so, my friend, they'll not let you take part in the steer-roping contest; what's the trouble? Perhaps I can arrange it. Just wait here a moment and let me see what I can do."

The gentleman then turned to the judges, saluted them, and advanced and engaged them in conversation for a few minutes, then came back to us, smiling, and said:

"It's all arranged, my friend; you are entered; they have placed you at the foot of the list. I wish you success."

Joe and me then went over to the corral where the steers to be roped were confined. They were a small, runty lot of Mexicans, all of them, except one big, black fellow, evidently from the Yankee side of the river. Joe said they were a "plum lively lot," and that it would hustle us ponies to catch them. He sat down in the grass, cross-legged, beside the

corral, along with five Mexicans and the one young Apache, who were entered in the contest. They rolled and smoked cigarettes and discussed the merits of their respective ponies, of rawhide as against the grass rope used by the Yankee, or double as against single cinch saddles, and other matters of interest to cow boys.

Some one from the grand stand called out the names of the contestants:

"Pedro Perez, Huascar di Don Juala, Tapia Caballero, M. de Espanol, Nunez Larruga, Apache Kid, and Three D. Joe." They were called before the judges and the simple rules of the contest stated to them. Each should have one trial only. He should stand at a designated place, the steers should be stirred up, when one selected at random would be released, chased toward the open plain, and when the animal crossed a line which was marked on the ground, eighty feet from the horseman, a pistol would be fired as a signal that he was to go. The animal must be lassoed, thrown, and securely tied down. The one doing this in the briefest time was to be the winner of the prize.

It was scarcely necessary to have stated the rules, as not one of the seven, except, perhaps, the little Apache, but had many times taken part in similar contests.

"Pedro Perez!" bawled out the big Mexican marshal.

Pedro mounted and stood at the post, the coil of his sixty-foot rawhide *riatta* lying loosely in his left hand, while his right shook free a long, gracefully drooping loop. A cloud of dust arose in the corral, where the cattle were being stirred up, the gate opened and closed quickly behind a flying steer, which headed swiftly for the open range.

A pistol shot rang out as the animal crossed the line, and Pedro's Mexican mustang sprang forward under spur. He was a good pony; the rawhide circled above the long horns and then dropped about the neck; then something occurred so quickly that the detail could hardly be caught. The steer lay on its side, Pedro lying across the body, the mustang straining on the rope; then Pedro sprang up, threw his sombrero high in the air, a signal to the time-keepers that the job was done.

Not badly done, either, Pedro, not badly done. Fifty-two seconds.

"Huascar di Danjuala," was the next call of the marshal. Huascar failed to catch his steer and was out of the running.

Tapia Caralata was the next. He showed up well with the rope, cut the time to forty-eight seconds, and came in glowing and confident that this would not be beaten, but he had beaten himself, his steer was dead, and, laying the blame on his pony, he bled its sides and flanks with the spurs.

"Juan Caballero." Juan rode a fine Pinto pony, and his selected steer ran swift and straight. It was a good pony, and Juan was a good rider and roper, but he roweled that pony outrageously. He made a nice clean throw and caught his steer nicely, and the Pinto threw him beautifully, as nice as I could have done it, and then he stood as a rock, holding the brute while Juan tied it. The time was cut to forty-two seconds.

"Nunez Larruga," was next called. He was a tall, lithe, handsome fellow, and as he darted forward at the report of the pistol, his outfit with its profusion of silver ornaments glit-

tered like water in the sunshine. Nunez did not touch his beautiful black, but that pony was onto his job all right, and Nunez made a good throw, taking the steer's neck perfectly; but there was a weak place in his rope and when the whole weight of the running horse was thrown against it the rope broke. Nunez quickly laid that pony again alongside the steer and leaning far over picked up the flying end of the rope, tied the two ends together, and threw the animal. The seconds had, however, been flying as well as the steer, and the poor fellow was given no time.

"M. de Espanol," was called. Espanol evidently thought himself better than the rest of the ropers. He had declined to sit in the grass and smoke with us, and when my master admired his handsome big pony, the gloomy Mexican gave him a cold and haughty stare. I thought Joe would call him down, but he didn't, he merely looked him coolly in the eye and said: "I'll see you later, old Don Quixote."

Espanol was a favorite with the aristocratic portion of the great crowd, though, for when he mounted and rode out he was

greeted with a loud hand-clapping from the grand stand. Joe said to me: "Buck, I guess that fellow must be a Big Bug, but he'll have to be a good deal bigger than he is to beat us."

He rode out to the post like a big chief, and an already winner; Joe was watching him closely, and I heard him murmur: "Damned old duffer." I was hoping that he would be given the big black steer, but I saw the gate shut squarely in the face of the animal when he was about to bolt out, and I saw it invitingly opened to the smallest and easiest one. When the pistol shot rang, and the powerful hind-quarters of his pony began work, it was a mighty few seconds until Espanol let go his rope. The heavy rope missed the steer entirely and swung around in front of the pony, and the next jump his hind feet were snared. Then there followed as pretty an exhibition of riotous bucking as I ever saw on either side the Rio Grande. I don't believe that Old Baldy himself could have beaten it even in his best days. I thought I knew a good deal about the art, but that pony showed me some steps

that I didn't know. Espanol's hat, with its dozens of tinkling silver bells about the brim, fell off, and the mustang planted his sharp hoofs upon it, all the time bawling ridiculously. Hundreds of voices from one part of the grounds shouted encouragement to the rider, while from another part went up a roar of voices encouraging the horse. Joe rolled in the grass at my feet laughing until I thought he'd get a fit sure, but he steadied himself, and loud above the roar came his voice:

"Go after him, Bronk, go after him!" Then Espanol's tight-fitting velvet jacket ripped up the back, and when Joe saw the flaps flopping with every plunge of the crazy mustang, and saw Espanol riding, now astride the pommel and now on the cantle of his gorgeous saddle, all his former dignity and grace a thing of the past, he yelled out to him:

"You're a goner, old sore-head, you're a goner!" Sure enough he was, for just then he landed in a heap on the ground. Friends flocked to his assistance and he staggered away, and I saw no more of him. Joe, the

tears streaming down his cheeks, gave me a friendly slap on the flank and said:

"Wasn't that a circus, though, Buck? I wouldn't have missed it for a month's pay."

There were left but two now, the little, quiet Apache and master; there were five steers still in the corral, four medium sized Mexicans and the big black American.

"Apache Kid" was called. With an air of confidence Kid took his place. It was mighty few clothes he wore, but he sat his pony beautifully, and if master had not been in the contest I should have wanted the lad to win. The steers were again mixed. Master said:

"If they give the Indian that big black, and he ties to him, there'll be trouble sure." And there was.

Everybody saw that they tried to hold back the black brute for Joe, but the animal was now in a frenzy, and when the gate was opened he charged straight for it, knocking his companions out of the way and riding them down, burst through, and was free. He did not seem to run fast, but there was a power in his movements which looked dan-

gerous for the little pony and his slim brown rider. There fell a dead silence; I guess everybody felt as I did, that something unpleasant would occur. You see it was seven hundred and fifty, may be eight hundred pounds of pony against twelve hundred, may be thirteen hundred pounds of steer. The odds were too great.

When the pistol was fired the boy sat free in his saddle and shook out a long loop of as pretty a rawhide as I ever saw, and, without swinging it at all, rode straight to the side of the steer, so close that the naked brown leg of the rider brushed against the shining black hide.

Kid's pony was snow white, he himself brown, and the steer black, and they made a pretty picture for the few jumps they took side by side before the catastrophe came. Joe said:

"No one ever accused an Apache of lack of nerve, but that kid takes the cake."

It certainly did take nerve to tie one end of his rope to the pommel of his saddle and put the noose at the other end about that steer's neck; but that is just what that kid

did. He did it so smoothly and with so little fuss, that I was surprised when the little white shot to the front, and just what I expected to happen did happen. There wasn't power enough on the rope, the steer was simply thrown sideways a little and his course changed, and when the rope tightened again it was with a vicious snap. It caught pony and rider off guard; the white pony and brown rider fell in a confused and dust hidden heap, but the pony sprang to his feet, bewildered and surprised, for he had been unsaddled. His saddle was dragging through the sage and greasewood behind the flying steer, at the end of the *riatta*. The horsehair cinchas had broken.

Kid, bruised and bleeding, but with countenance as placid and unruffled as though he sat in his own tepee, shook himself free of those who would have helped him, painfully made his way back to the corral, where he again sat in the grass. His wife, a wee brown mite of a girl, her face painted handsomely, her slender form hidden beneath a beautiful Navajoe blanket, crawled to his side and sat in silence while Joe patted the

"THEY MADE A PRETTY PICTURE."—page 75.

naked brown shoulder of the bruised boy, saying: "Good boy, good boy."

The lad tried to roll a cigarette, but his right arm was on a strike and hung limp at his side, but little "Paint Face," as Joe called his wife, rolled the smokes for him. Rifle shots were heard in the distance; horsemen came bringing the wrecked saddle; they had killed the steer in order to recover it.

It was now Joe's turn and mine. Forty-two seconds to beat. The party of Americans had joined us at the corral, and Joe was drawing his grass rope backward and forward under his instep, taking out the kinks and twists. Someone said to Joe:

"Can you beat forty-two seconds?"

Joe answered: "Well, now, in this business, skill counts, of course, but after all it is largely a matter of luck. No man is any good if he is down on his luck; I'm afraid I'm short of it to-day. Forty-two seconds is not dangerous time, but a lot of things may happen that a fellow don't expect. There was that Greaser Larruga, he would have done the job in mighty quick time if his rope hadn't broken; then there is the matter of

horse. Kid's horse was too light and not onto his job. Kid himself is a dandy and I wish he'd done better; he deserved to. I'm long on horse, though, and I'll do the best I can."

"Buck's all right, is he?" was asked.

"The best on earth," replied Joe, who always did know a good pony.

There was in the party of Americans a handsome girl; her cheeks were aflame and her eyes snapped with excitement. She took from the bosom of her waist a pretty little red, white and blue badge and coolly pinned it to Joe's breast saying:

"That's for luck, Mr. Three D. Joe."

Joe looked confused, foolish, and pleased. He touched the brim of his sombrero, and replied:

"I ought to win, wearing that."

I was nervous, but Joe was as cool and deliberate as I ever saw him, and it seemed to me he never was slower. Joe didn't have to tell me what to do; I knew, and he knew that I knew. He gave me a slack rein, and when the pistol was fired I placed him in short order right at the flank of his steer,

"THAT'S FOR LUCK, THREE D. JOE."—page 80.

but he swung and swung his rope until I thought he never would throw it. My heart thumped so that I could hear and feel it, then he touched me with the spurs, just the faintest little touch, I could scarcely feel it. Well, I heard that steer grunt when he struck the ground, for I had thrown him pretty quick, and I knew he wouldn't struggle until master had time to tie his legs."

"Back up, Buck; back, sir!" he yelled, and I slackened the rope. Joe took it from the steer's neck, where he lay, with three legs tied together. How good I felt then. There on the corral fence, strung out like crows on the limb of a dead cottonwood tree, was the American party shouting and clapping their hands, and waving handkerchiefs, and I knew we had won.

Thirty-eight seconds. As we walked back to the corral, Joe patted my neck and said:

"We did show those Greasers a trick, didn't we, Old Fellow?"

They all shook hands with Joe and petted and praised me, and it paid me for all the hard work I did to get Joe there. These are the happiest moments of a pony's life,

when he knows that he has done his duty and done it well, and that his boss appreciates him. I again thought: "How alike are ponies and bosses." The pony colt and the boy boss think their frivolous joys all there is in the world worth living for; but when maturity comes to them, they find that the joys of those immature days were trivial and unsatisfying compared with the richer joy and more solid satisfaction of a certain sense of duty well done.

The winner of the contest was now called to the judges' stand to receive the prize, which was a beautifully ornamented Mexican saddle. It fairly blazed with gold and silver ornaments. They said that the gold star on the pommel alone cost one hundred dollars. Joe whispered in my ear:

"This makes me tired, don't it you, Buck?" but it didn't.

Joe's countrymen admired the saddle and wished to buy it, but master wouldn't sell it to them; he said:

"I've no use for the saddle, I don't want it, but I think I'll not sell it, though perhaps I can arrange for you; wait a moment."

A little dried up, old Indian woman sat on the ground near by; her face was the color of grass in winter; it was seamed with wrinkles, they laying in folds; eyes bleared and dim; she was toothless, and she mumbled when she spoke to the half dozen half-naked children for whom she cared.

That master of mine raised the old crone to her unsteady feet and led her to the saddle, saying:

"I give you the saddle, Granny, it is yours to do what you will with it, but I would like if you would sell it to my friends here." Then he checked her flow of gratitude. "Granny here will sell you the saddle," said Jack, addressing the Americans.

The wrinkled, brown and trembling old hands clutched the silver fortune with pathetic eagerness. She would again have poured forth her gratitude, and would have called down on his head the blessings of all the saints in the calendar. I thought Joe should have allowed her to do it, too; they might have helped him sometime in the future, I don't know, but Joe hushed her, and

gently led her back to her little brown flock, and bade her good-bye, saying:

"Adios, Granny. You are a homely old critter, but God bless you just the same."

Master took the little red, white and blue badge in his hand, and would have returned it to the pretty girl who gave it him. He stood before her, bare-headed, and embarrassed, and said:

"This brought the luck you wished me; perhaps I had now better return it to you."

The girl with the flaming cheeks and bright eyes took the badge. I hated her then; but when she pinned it again on Joe's breast, and smiled up at him, and said: "For luck before; this time for you," I loved her.

Master's sombrero swept the ground as he bowed low before her, saying never a word. He swung clumsily into the saddle, and we rode away out of the crowds, into the sage brush. There he stood beside me a long time, holding the badge in his hand; I guess he was thinking. He looked at me foolishly and weakly, and said:

"Buck, I can't throw this thing away, can I? You saw where it came from, off her

GRANNY.

breast. I'll not wear it down there amongst that infernal rabble, would you? Let's go home." The next morning I was in the Three D herd. Joe was on duty again as usual.

CHAPTER VII.

Ave Marie.

Of course, all cowboys can sing to a bunch of cattle while on night herd. They have to do it to keep the cattle quiet, but Joe could sing strange songs and tunes, in a strange language, which none of us understood, and he sang them so sweetly that even a pony's eyes moistened. When he was singing those strange songs, he grew sober and tender and didn't swear. He seemed like a woman then.

One night we were holding a big bunch of beeves. It was as dark as utter blackness; the

cattle were ugly, milling round and round. They led off here, and led out there. Half of the outfit was on night herd, reënforcing the usual night herders, and above the grind of twenty thousand hoofs, above the click of thousands of horns, arose the incessant lulling drone of the cow boys' attempted songs.

The only way we could tell where one's mates were, was by the singing of the men, and the only way the night herders could tell where the herd was, was by the dull rumble and grumble and roar which arose like the sound of a distant waterfall.

Of course, they had to rely on us ponies to turn back the drifts, and we did it. Toward morning, however, a gentle rain began falling. Joe said it would draw the electricity from the air and that the cattle would soon lie down. Sure enough, when they had become thoroughly wet they became quieter, and at length bedded. A white mist rolled down over us, a heavy silence settled in the valley; then Joe's voice arose out of the darkness, the silence, and the mists,—arose trembling on the night air, filling the valley

with sounds so sweet that they went straight to the heart, like the plaint of a girl child.

The song was one of those strange ones, oddly out of place there. It began: "*Ave Maria.*"

The rain cloud drifted past. The motionless form of the sleeping herd and the shapes of the night herders, standing like grim statues at intervals about, slowly grew upon the vision. So absorbed was I in the voice of the singer, that I had not noticed the approach of a horse and rider from camp, which was at a spring not far distant, but when the last notes of the song had sobbed themselves away, there at my side was Al Taddigan, the range manager.

"Joe, there is a man up at camp wants to see you," he said

"So?" was Joe's query.

"Yes, after you came on herd a party of the owners came in on us to look over the shipment. When you began your Dago song one of them sprang up, saying: 'My God, I know that voice. I'd know it among a million. For God's sake, Taddigan, take me to him.' He started straight down here.

Why, he'd have stampeded the herd sure. The only way I could stop him was to come after you myself."

"So? What's his name?" asked Joe.

Taddigan gave his name. I do not remember it now. Joe spoke again:

"Al, what's this pony worth?"

"What the devil has that got to do with it? Go up to camp. I'll stand your trick out."

"What is this buckskin worth?" Joe again asked.

"About fifty, I guess; but I don't see—"

"Cut that out, Al. You owe me seventy. I give you that for Buck. Good-bye, shake."

"Where in ——— are you going?"

"From one hell to another. It's just one good long ride for Buck and I from here."

With a snap of the reins, quite unlike Joe, he swung me sharply around and rode away southward, toward the Rio Grande. Slipping and sliding across the greasy alkali flats, struggling through the pasty gumbo, up hill and down, at a tired canter, always to the southward, with never a pause, for fourteen long hours we journeyed.

Off saddle and bridle at the Hog Ranch.

How I hated that place! It was the resort of all the Mexican, negro, mixed blood and white cutthroats and outlaws of the border; the home of a score of shameless women of every hue to be found in that wide land of varied shades and colors.

I had often heard that the life of him who entered within its black walls was valued no more than a pinch of alkali dust. We were no strangers; I had brought Joe here many times before, and now we were treated with a storm of welcome from the inmates, mostly women, though, who flocked out and around us, as Joe removed my saddle and bridle.

It was not the old Joe whom they now greeted. The old time merry laughter had forsaken his lips; likewise the bright jest. He cast an ugly look at the half dozen Mexicans leaning against the mud walls of the shack, and bade them:

"Set me some grub, I'm hungry;" then he laid his arm about my neck and nose, his cheek against my cheek, and said these strange words: '*Adios,* old trusty, God bless you. If all the world was as true as you, there would

have been no black sheep in our family, and I'd not be here. But say, Buck, if I cross the Dark River before you do, and I do get inside Old St. Peter's Corral,—guess I'll not get there, Buck,—when you come over, you hunt me up. If they don't let you inside the pearly gates, just you show your yellow nose over the corral fence where I can see it, and I'll put up such a talk as will fix it for you. I'll tell the old saint how trusty and brave you was down here, through fair weather and foul, when there was grub in the pony chuck-box and when it was empty; how you never told a lie, either by look or deed, never drank budge, never faltered in your duty, although it's mighty little you've had for the doing of it. And say, Buck, if I can't get you in, by the eternals! I'll come out to you, and we'll have such a ride as we never had before.

"'Breast the Black Flood, Buck, without shrinking and without fear when your time to cross comes. There's better pastures on the other side for such as you, old fellow, than you've ever known. And now, old friend, *Adios, adios.* God bless you.'"

It was dark now. I hung about close to the ranch, hoping that he would come out and leave that devil's den. Tired and hungry as I was, steady and strong, I would have gladly borne him away. I heard the sound of fiddles and the shuffle of dancing feet; I heard the click of ivory and the clink of glass; I heard strange oaths in strange tongues; I heard songs of gaiety and yells of misery, the thick voices of drunken desperadoes and the musical tones of Southern women mingled in the infernal medley.

Then came a dead silence for a moment. The crackle of small calibre guns; the sullen, dull roar of a heavier weapon, such as the American cowboys carry—one, two, three, four, five, six, and I recognized the report of Joe's 45's. One was empty, but Joe carried a pair of them.

The lights went out; women fled through the night; men reeled forth, staggering, falling, in silence. Points of flame flashed through door and window.

"One, two, three." I kept tally on Joe's gun. Flames burst out of the thatched roof; smoke poured from door and window,—

ROPING FOR PRIZES.

"four, five,"—but one shot left. Why don't Joe come out of that furnace?

But one shot left. It came out of the midst of the smoke and flames. I knew the end had come; had Joe reached that other hell which he sought? *Quien sabe?*

The morning dawned on a scene of death and desolation. Strange odors arose from the smoking ruins. Haggard women, half clothed, crept furtively back from places of concealment; they gathered the dead and bore them into the shade, closing the sightless eyes.

They crossed themselves and muttered prayers. A squad of rangers galloped up and came suddenly upon the row of bodies, lying there, side by side.

They checked their ponies so suddenly that the dust spouted from under their feet and settled upon the upturned faces of the dead.

"Well done, Americano Joe; be you living or dead. Nothing for us to do here," spoke the captain of the squad, then they galloped away as they had come, leaving the dead men to be cared for by the living women.

L. OF C.

I hung about all that day and the succeeding night, hoping, hoping; although I knew that there was none, that Joe might come for me; then, sad hearted, almost weary of life, I wandered slowly back to the old life at the ranch.

CHAPTER VIII.

He Was a Girl.

I now again entered upon the usual routine work of a cow ranch; I was only too glad to do it, for I had had enough excitement and tragedy to last me for the remainder of my days; I longed for the commonplace only.

The season had been a good one; the calf crop was enormous; every nook and corner of the range must be searched and these jack-rabbit-like infants must be caught, ear-marked, and branded. It was much like a beef round-up, but vastly harder work on us ponies. Many round-up outfits were required for the work, but the outfit I was with

was the home ranch outfit and was in charge of a blonde young Yankee named Jack Prescott. He was an Eastern boy, of good family and education. Years before he had hooked up with the — 7 — (bar 7 bar) brand people, and had grown in their service, until now he was foreman. A very different man he was from Joe; he was quiet, clean, never talked loud or used coarse or profane language.

The hardest work for us was after the rounding-up of the cattle, and consisted in catching the calves for branding. When the circles had been ridden, and everything within them had been bunched as near as possible to wood and water, the pony herd would be driven into the rope corral and each man would catch his best, or "roping horse," and it was then spur and rope. It is astonishing what an amount of hard riding it would sometimes take to catch a calf. They would run so close alongside of, or underneath the bellies of their mothers that it was almost impossible for the best man to get a rope about their necks or legs, but once they were snared, it was all speed for the fire and the hot irons.

I have heard them say that when I started for the fire with a calf tied to the pommel of my saddle, that calf struck the high places only, and I guess that that was true, for the calf would pull much easier while going at full speed than when it was on its feet and pulling back.

When the round-up was finished, the ponies were pretty well worn down. The beef round-up would soon be on, and Jack, prince of cow men that he was, knew that he must have fresh, strong horses for the work, and he accordingly detailed five of his men to go up into the Indian Territory after a fresh bunch. I was one of the ponies taken; my rider was a little fellow, too light for round-up work, and, as was proven in the end, in every way unfitted for the business. I do not think that he was more than sixteen years old, and I have carried many men weighing twice as much as he. His face was delicate and fair, or would have been, had it not been tamed and seared by the hot winds. His hands and feet were small as a child's, and the voice was low and girlish. The lad shunned the rough sports

of his companions, though he was always ready for work.

The boy's quiet ways aroused all the thoughtless cruelty with which the hide of the average cowboy is always filled to bursting; they thought it smart to play coarse practical jokes on him, and the pathetic patience with which he bore them made it all the funnier, so his tormentors seemed to think. It was cactus in the kid's boots and gumbo in his hair; it was salt in his coffee and horned toads in his blankets the livelong day and the livelong night.

I never heard the lad complain to them, but if they had not been blind brutes they would have seen that they were breaking the boy's heart. More than once when we were alone did he clasp my neck in his arms and burst out sobbing:

"Oh, Buck, I can't stand this life, can I? Why didn't they kill me back there in the desert as they did my poor mother, then I might have rested by her side. But this life even is better than the one they tried to make me lead, ain't it? The end will come sometime, soon I hope," and then there would

come a wan little smile on the tightening lips.

We received the horses and started back with them for the ranch, driving hard and guarding them closely, for the Indian Nation at that time was the paradise of the outlaw of every description, and Big Cy. Roberts, our head man, said he "didn't propose to lose his ponies." We had been out on the home trail about three or four days and had not seen a human being save our own party. It was evening, and camp had been made just as the big, red, hot sun was touching the tops of the grass in the far west. A precious spring bubbled from the ground, filling the air with as sweet music as ever tickled the ear of thirsty man or pony; the packs had been stripped from the backs of the pack ponies and they had wandered away to join the herd, which grazed in the valley a half mile below. Five tired saddle ponies stood, their bridle reins hanging loose, a sign to them that they were not to wander. The wranglers squatted by the tiny camp-fire; supper was almost ready; laughter, jest and banter floated free from lip to lip. Suddenly the earth throbbed under the hammering hoof-

beats of our pony herd and every man sprang to his horse; what they saw was our pony herd, half hidden by a dust cloud, sweeping fast down the valley, while horsemen darted in and out of the dust, urging the stampeded horses to greater speed.

There was no need for orders; every man understood his duty, and five wranglers sprang to saddle; five wranglers raced as though their lives were the stake after the stolen herd. As they rode, four of the five riders tightened the cartridge belts about their loins, and twirled the cylinders of their 45's, making sure that each carried the full six shots. One, my little rider, bore no gun. I hung back, thinking that he had no business in the melee which I saw was sure to follow, but it was no use, for he forced me full abreast of the leader. One mile, two miles, three miles, under strain and spur. We were drawing up on them, and it was only a long pistol shot between us now. Men dropped back out of the dust cloud, steadied their well trained horses, and—bang, bang, bang, came the first pistol shots. The dust clouds swept on; never a rein was drawn.

The only effect of the shots was to draw from the lips of Big Cy. the first words uttered since the race began. Cool and quiet, he said:

"Ride low, boys, and spread out." We had been riding closely bunched.

The valley was narrowing fast; the dust cloud hung far behind the racing herd; pursuers were now mere phantoms racing through the gloom of gathering darkness and settling clouds of dust out of which the reports of the six-shooters came with a dull and muffled sound. Ahead it could be seen that the valley narrowed to a mere pass or gap, and then that rider of mine, lying low on my neck, swung me to one side, and, cutting my sides with the spurs, rode like a demon around the flank of the herd and out into the clear air in its front. There in the gap he faced about in a brave effort to stop the stampeding horses.

Pistol shots rang from wall to wall, and bullets reached ponies as well as men for whom they were intended. As men and horses fell, the followers stumbled over their

bodies, mangling, bruising and crushing the fallen.

The chase was too hot, the onslaught too fierce for the thieves; they dropped the stolen herd and fled, what was left of them, and as they did they leaned low over the manes of their ponies, holding in their hands hot, smoking and empty pistols.

My little master lay at my feet, and I saw a smile on the pinched face as he said: "The end has come, Buck."

His comrades gathered around the dying boy, but it was Big Cy who raised the little head, saying: "Laddie, Laddie, I called you a coward. I'm sorry I did; you are braver than any of us. Forgive me."

Softly the dying boy replied to the appeal of the big foreman: "I did my best, I tried to stop them."

One small, round, white arm was shattered by an ill-sent outlaw's bullet; the other feebly drew the big face of the boss down to the white lips, which whispered into his startled ears a secret, which none had known but me.

"My God, why didn't you tell me before? I wouldn't have allowed you to come here."

"It's all right, yes, all right." came the answer, "only, don't undress me; I forgive ——" He had reached the end of his trail.

Four sober faced men, in the gloom of a moonless night, gathered around a shallow grave; within, wrapped in coarse woolen blankets, lay a poor, little, slim and broken body. Awkwardly the men stood there, feeling that something should be said, then Big Cy spoke: "Say a prayer, some of you men."

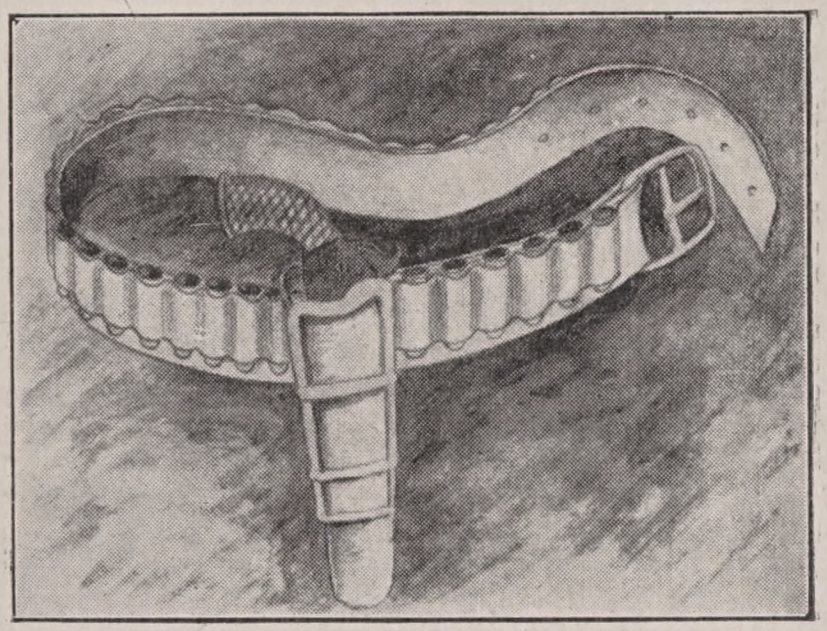
Each looked helplessly in the face of the other. They were as brave men as ever drew rein, but this was asking too much of them. Then the big fellow stepped to the head of the open grave, knelt and prayed:

"Good Lord, I don't believe that I'm fitten to pray, but the parson down at Dodge told us that the prayers of even such sinners as we-uns are, will be heard by you, and so, here goes. I want to apologize to this poor, dead boy for all the mean things I ever done to him, and especially for calling 'im a coward. He sure had more sand 'n any of us. I'm sorry he didn't tell me he was a girl before he was hurted. I wouldn't have allowed him to ride into the scrap if I'd knowed it.

"Forgive me for it, Lord. Forgive these wranglers for all the mean things they done to him. They didn't know either, Lord, and honestly they ain't such an ornery lot as they seem to be. I know that they are tollable tough, I know that, but their hearts are all right. I guess the kid'll be happier with you, Lord, than he was with us. She told me there in the gap, when she whispered to me, that she wanted to go to her mother, and to you.

"Take her, Lord, and be good to her, and we'll be your friends as long as we live. Amen."

Months later I passed the spot again. The mound of rocks above the lonely grave of the girl cowboy was undisturbed.



CHAPTER IX.

Senorita Inez.

On our return to the ranch I was taken into Jack's string of ponies. I was glad to be Jack's pony, as he was a kind master. The other ponies called me a "Headquarters' Pet," but I didn't mind that at all so long as Jack liked me.

One evening I stood on three feet, resting saddled and bridled, tired and hot, at the ranch-house door, and was wanting a post to lean against. Jack, too, lounged upon a bench

near by, tired also, for we had been doing some pretty lively work that day.

Down the Wingate trail rolled a bunch of dust, which mostly hid from view a buck-board drawn by a slashing big pair of Mexican mustangs, driven by a dried-up specimen from the other side of the Rio Grande. Beside the old man on the driver's seat was a person almost entirely hidden beneath a great veil or cloak, a "mantilla," Jack called it. The mustangs swung up to the door of the ranch house at full speed, where the old mummy brought them to a full stop instantly.

Jack arose and awaited the old man's greeting. In broken English and cracked Spanish he introduced himself:

"Senor Rodrigo Valquez, owner of the Coiled Serpent ranch, beyond the Rio Grande, the humble servant of the Senor Americano. Those clouds, banked over there above the *mesa,* will bring a storm; might we remain at the Senor Americano's over night?"

"*Si, Senor.*" I guess Jack thought the little figure, which still remained bundled up

on the seat, was the old Don's wife; I thought so too.

The little thing within the veil sprang to the ground, but quite too lightly for the old Senor Rodrigo's wife, I thought. The stern lines on Jack's handsome face relaxed. He made a bow to the opaque figure, which gave itself a flirt, a shuffle and a few shakes, exactly as I have many a time seen a grouse do, after taking a dust bath.

The great black veil was loosened and tossed carelessly back upon the buckboard, just as though she was accustomed to having some one follow her about and wait upon her, and I guess she was. Jack was bowing almost to the ground now.

"I have but a poor place, not fit for the Senor and Senorita, but such as it is you own it. I will be forever honored if you will remain until the storm, which will surely break within the hour, has passed and the trails are dried."

I no longer stood upon three legs, but upon all four, well set under my body, head up, ears erect. I didn't want to disgrace Jack.

I have seen many women in my day, but I solemnly declare I have seen none to compare with the little Senorita Inez, the old Don's daughter, who stood there, cool, composed, dainty and neat as though just out of a trunk.

She was not more than five feet tall, I think, but oh! so beautiful. There was a superb suppleness and grace in every line and movement; her rich sunshiny brown hair hung in one long braid, and the deep brown eyes matched well with the rich warm Southern complexion which freshened and flamed at cheek and throat, under Jack's ardent gaze, for, while in bad Spanish, Jack blundered his hot welcome to the old Don, he still looked upon the daughter.

As I watched her beautiful eyes droop and half hide behind the long lashes, I somehow thought of an old friend. He was an iron grey, and foaled on the same range as myself, and was the worst bucker I have ever known. When about to be mounted he would stand stock still, eyes half closed, as though the entire matter was one of total indifference to him, but watching closely,

"HE WAS THE WORST BUCKER I EVER KNEW."— page 114.

under the drooping eyelids, one might catch a suspicious sidewise glance which told us, who knew him well, that his rider, unless the very best, must pull leather. I thought I caught the same look in the downcast eyes of the senorita, and I marveled: "What will the end be?"

With the free step of an unbroken colt, she stepped up to me and laid the smallest, softest, and warmest hand I had ever felt upon my neck and nose, and murmured in clean cut English: "What a beautiful pony!"

Jack and I both nearly fell down to hear her speak in our tongue. We thought she, of course, spoke only Spanish. The truth was, that the old man had met her at Fort Wingate as she was returning from a school in the States where she had been taught not only the language of her Northern sisters, but also a few things besides.

That sweetly caressing touch of the little brown hand, and the murmured appreciation of my good looks, settled the matter with me and I straightway became her pony lover. Had she then asked them of me, I would willingly have given her my teeth, and I

knew that if Jack ever felt the touch of that hand, he was a goner too.

The storm broke furiously. All the next day sheets of wind-driven rain, like grey ghosts, chased across the plains and forbade travel. Jack stuck close to the house that day, as was his duty, entertaining his guests, and I saw him once only. He came out where I was, and, patting my dripping neck, said:

"Well, Buck, she's a hummer, ain't she?"

I knew he referred to the Senorita Inez, but as I didn't know what a "hummer" was, I made no reply. He turned his face to the storm, and bearing his curly blonde head, continued:

"Go it, old Boreas, stick to it so the old devil can't get away for a week."

The next morning, though it still rained torrents, the old Don Rodrigo, with mighty Spanish oaths, swore he'd go, though the heavens split wide open and all the dammed water there was up there came down! Go he did, and in the midst of splashings of mud and mumbled Spanish oaths, the old fellow bravely took the lines and curbed the restless mustangs. Jack fairly lifted the

Senorita to her seat, and I plainly saw a little hand steal out from under the enveloping tarpaulins into Jack's sinewy, freckled hand, and he clasped it for an instant in his.

I felt in my bones that there were complications and tragedies looming up on Jack's trail and mine. Jack would have guided the old man by a shorter route which followed the gravelly divide, so that he might avoid the slippery gumbo bottoms, but the old fellow would have none of it, so Jack stood there watching, with a strange wistful look on his face, watching them fade into the distance, then he snatched the dripping sombrero from his head, pressed his lips to the wet brim, and with a long sweep of his arm toward the fast disappearing buckboard, wafted his first lover's kiss to his sweetheart. Out from the buckboard fluttered something tiny and white.

Jack understood it. The next day Jack came out where I was, carrying a small box in which was some dry stuff, which rustled and rattled when shaken. He held it up to me and said: "Eat it, Buck, it is good."

I smelled of it, and it did smell good, but

I had never eaten anything but grass and brush and cactus and such stuff, and I didn't want it. Jack insisted that I should eat it and he opened my mouth and filled it with the stuff. It tasted good. He said it was oats, and that it would make me fat and strong; so just to please him I ate it. I liked it, too.

Every day after that he brought me out a feed of oats, and how I did fatten. Why, I felt like an unbroken three-year-old. For a couple of weeks I did nothing but lounge about and eat; I was wanting a good stiff ride, and I got it.

Early one morning, about two or three o'clock, I guess, Jack saddled me, and from the care which he took I was satisfied that he had important business on hand. He tied a mysterious bundle on the saddle, and we pulled out. Slowly, now at a walk, then at a wolf trot with now and then, on smooth ground, a short canter, we stretched away towards the Rio. The sun blazed hot in the sky, and the heat rose quivering from the ground, looking like a swarm of bees or

grasshoppers, but it was walk, trot, canter, with never a pause, hour after hour.

Jack whistled and sang little snatches of love songs. He was happy, all unmindful of the black shadow which was spreading out and wrapping him in its fatal folds. Through fragrant fields of wild flowers, here bedecking the ground with a brilliant crimson carpet, and now with white and, anon, with blue, Jack and I steadily put the miles behind us.

Now and then a grey wolf, startled from his lair, would lumber away unheeded, or an insolent coyote trotted off a few yards, sat down and stared at us. A few antelope waved their white flags at us, and, saving these, we were alone in the midst of this glorious ocean.

Jack felt the beauty and the majesty of it all as I did; the whistle and the song died away on his lips, and I was not surprised when at length he spoke.

"Buck, I pity those poor mortals who spend their days ever between brick walls, and those millions of poor horses whose dried and iron pinched hoofs never, their

whole lives long, have known the elastic feel of God's carpet."

I said nothing, for fear that he would quit talking, and I loved to hear him talk like this. He continued:

"I tell you, Buck, if I were a king and could make laws, I'd make one that every horse, after a certain service, should be pensioned off and given a range like this to live and die on."

"Are there so many horses badly treated, Master? I did not know it," I responded.

"Indeed there are, Buck, more than there are hairs on your yellow hide. Horses that are worked, abused, starved, by cruel, ignorant and inhuman masters, with no possible relief until kindly death comes to them. It is a sad chapter, old fellow, a heart-breaking chapter. Death and misery, misery and death, the world over, and the world of men too busy to give heed. Oh, if I were but king."

What he said affected me so deeply that I could only reply: "But you are *my* king, master."

He was silent, but he stroked my neck,

and I understood. After a long pause, he added: "It is women and horses, old fellow, that get the worst of it in this wide world, ever and ever."

The sun was now well nigh overhead, and we were riding harder; it was trot and canter now, no more walking. That was the way Jack always did when he had a hard ride to make; slow and easy at first, gradually increasing the pace, the hard push coming at the end. At the crown of a gravel divide we stopped; Jack dismounted and rearranged blankets and saddle, and, pointing away to the southward, said:

"See that dark line away yonder, Buck? Well, there we'll take a rest, and I have something in my pack for you."

Two hours later, it was off saddle on the banks of the same old Rio Grande. First, a plunge for us both, and then that mysterious pack was opened. I was as curious as a filly to know what it contained, and was pleased when, from its depths, he produced a nice feed of oats for me. I was awfully glad to get them, for I was too tired to graze.

Then out of the pack came a lunch for

himself, next, what he called a "looking glass," a razor, and a bar of soap. The way that fellow soaped and washed and scraped his face, just amused me, but when he had finished and put on a nice clean shirt, I was proud of him.

The sun was drifting into the west when he had done, and he resaddled me. We forded the river and made a hard two hours' ride straight into the heart of Chiuahua. We passed through great herds of long horned cattle, small, runty, ill favored things, all bearing the coiled serpent brand. then we finally came to the Coiled Serpent Ranch.

It was a beautiful place, in a wild and extraordinary way. Everything was of adobe. The corral yard and garden fences were of adobe, the great cool stables were of adobe, what I could see of the house through the tropical wealth of encumbering vines and shrubbery, was also of the same material. Little streams of water flowed everywhere, cooling and moistening the otherwise burning atmosphere. Climbing rose vines festooned from gable and veran-

dahs, painting the dull mud with such a flame of color as I had never dreamed of. The air was redolent with a thousand sweet perfumes, and it seemed to me to be a fit home for an oriental grandee, as, in truth, it almost was.

At the arched, vine-wreathed gateway Jack left me. As though he was master of it all, straight, springy and proud, he strode up the broad walk and on to the verandah. There, just as I expected, he was met by the Senor Rodrigo, but I was too far away to hear what was said, though I saw the old fellow bow low over Jack's hand, and doubtless he protested that while the Senor Americano would honor him by remaining under his roof, he should consider himself the master and owner of the whole outfit.

A peon came to take me to the stable, and as I turned to leave I saw the Senorita Inez come tripping out, light as air, beautifully gowned, a soft, sweet song on her lips, which was suddenly hushed, at seeing my master there, standing straight as an Apache.

He was before her instantly, her hand in his, and, bending low, I saw him press a

kiss upon the pink palm. He had bearded the old lion in his very lair. I was led away, and, in justice to that peon, I will say that I was well cared for.

I saw no more of Jack until the next afternoon. He came alone for me, and there was a flush on his cheek and a blaze in his eye. I knew something had happened. He saddled me with a snap and vigor and in silence. I didn't like that. We then rode the back trail slowly, and I was glad we were leaving, although I will confess that I too wanted to see the little Senorita and feel her hand on my neck and nose once more. Darkness fell, then about face. Just where the dusty roadway swept around a great jutting rock, we turned off to the left and went down into a sheltered and half hidden *coulee*. Here Jack dismounted, unsaddled me, and turned me loose to graze. There we waited.

A double darkness wrapped all in gloom; still in utter silence and painful expectancy we waited on; then came the soft mincing tread of a horse, and Jack held the Senorita in his arms, tight pressed to his breast, in

silence, his lips pressed to hers, and I touched noses with the stranger horse; it was a mare.

"Do you know what they have done up there, my lover, my own?" the Senorita said to my master. "Why, this is what they have done; they have sent out the 'runners,' inviting the whole countryside to a fiesta at our house for to-morrow. I am to be married then, yes, married to that cut-throat and outlaw, Valquez. I am sold like a horse or a cow, aye, sold, but not yet delivered to that bloody renegado. Before his foul lips shall touch mine I shall be dead. One can always die, can not one, Jack? I love you, Jack, you only, have I not proven it? Do what you will with me. I follow where you lead, and when the end comes, and come it will, Jack, we may die together, may we not, dear? It will be sweet, oh, so sweet, to die here, Jack, here, on your dear breast; so much sweeter than to live otherwheres."

"You shall live, live always here, precious sweetheart, live for me, and I will live for you. They shall not part us."

The mare ridden by the little miss followed in my tracks and I had no chance to

speak with her. The solemn grey of the morning came just when we reached the Rio. Jack helped her to alight, and while he murmured hot words of fondness and encouragement in her willing ears, her mare and I breathed great draughts of the sweet morning air, for Jack had loosened our cinchas; then I had my first good look at the mount of the little woman, and I found her a beauty. She was a rich red bay, her nostrils were wide open and thin; her eyes the same rich deep brown as those of her mistress. In ear, neck, form and limb, as clean cut and graceful as the Senorita herself. Truly a fit mount for so lovely a burden.

"Jack, dear, father will follow us," said the Senorita.

"But we will not follow the trails, dear, and they cannot overtake us," was the reply.

"But Old Toni, dear, Old Toni, the Apache trailer, father will send him. He can trail a jack rabbit, so it is said."

"It were better for Old Toni did he not trail us," said Jack.

"But, dear, father, Valquez and Martinez will follow, too."

"They will all be healthier to-morrow, dear, if they do not overtake us."

Down the Rio, in water to our bellies, slipping and blundering over the stony bed of the stream, until the treacherous quicksands threatened to engulf us, then dry land again.

It was now a ride for life. There had been no signs of pursuit, but all felt that a brown shadow trotted, trotted unerringly and swiftly on our trail. The perils were too momentous for speech; the silence was painful.

It was trot and canter; pushing, ever pushing us to our limit. Two, four, six hours; sixty miles, and never a drop of water to moisten our dry lips; eighty miles since starting. I no longer felt the hot breath of the mare upon my hips; often I heard her stumble. I was sorry for her, for a braver beast than the red bay filly I have never known.

Water at last. A pool only, but oh, how welcome it was. There was a tremble at the flank of the bay filly, and thump, thump, be-

hind the shoulder blade. I have seen over-ridden cow ponies, thus affected, fall dead, but there was glorious leather in that little mare.

Standing there by the pool side, while Jack braved up the Senorita, that mare, her flanks quivering, her sides thumping, and her breath rasping through a throat already half paralyzed, took with me the pony oath, that "we would carry Jack and the lass to safety, or we would die trying. We can do no more than that, can we," said the bay.

Two hours of welcome rest, but how short they were. It was walk and trot again now; we kept the coulees, rising the ridges only where it could not be avoided.

Jack, trim and alert as usual, fell back often now and kissed the little woman. Her seat was no longer steady and firm; a pallor was upon her face, as was also a terror in her heart. Ten miles more behind us. The end was coming fast, and Jack, with those same steady brave eyes, often scanned the horizon behind us.

I felt him give a start. As soon as I could I looked back along the way we had come,

and I saw, maybe a mile distant, a strange figure, trotting, trotting, head low upon breast, following every bend of our trail.

"Dearie, Old Toni comes; stay here, I will go back and meet him!"

Jack walked swiftly back toward the approaching figure. There was a flash from Jack's hip, and Old Toni lay face downward in the salt grass.

The red bay filly's breath came hard. Her pretty head drooped lower and lower, but with a final supreme effort she tossed it high in the air, with something of her old time jaunty and coquettish look; she champed the bit in her dry mouth, making the half-breed wheel sing; there was a bewildered and half scared look out of the glazing eyes, the head sank lower and lower still, until the swollen lips ground in the gravel, then the knees gave way. She had kept our pony oath.

Even as Jack shifted the Senorita's light saddle to my back, we all heard the whistle of great black wings overhead, and shuddered.

It was walk now, I carrying the Senorita, who seemed to have shrunk to the measure

of a child. Jack was afoot, still steady and erect, cheering us with brave and kindly words, telling us that from yonder divide he would show us the fort. He called me his brave pony; he called the senorita his heart and his life. He said:

"Their horses have played out, and we will outwalk them."

But the Senorita replied: "No, dear, the Coiled Serpent horses do not play out, they are famous all over Chiuahua; my mare was an American. I will tell you how they are traveling; they are leading their best horses, and when they find old Toni's—when they find old Toni's body—they will mount their lead horses, and then they will come like a whirlwind."

"Whoa, Buck!" called Jack, then the little figure leaned down from the saddle.

"A kiss, dear; we will die together, see?" and she half drew from her girdle a shining blade. Putting one finger tip on the hilt, Jack slowly pressed the blade back into its sheath.

"Nay, nay, dear, we will not die; ride on, sweetheart."

There lay the blessed fort, a white splash on the yellow horizon; a crimson spot above it.

"My country's flag; *our* country's flag. God bless it! Ride on, dear."

"Hold, Jack."

I saw a swift shadow sweep over her sweet face. "They are coming, Jack."

Sure enough, just mounting the bench on which we stood, were three horsemen. I saw the glitter of silver ornaments on saddle, bridle, rowels and hat band, and in the little humped up figure on the big black, I recognized the old Senor Rodrigo.

The three horsemen changed their course slightly on seeing us; separated, leaving intervals between them, then they came at a leisurely canter, sure of their game.

"Ride straight toward the fort, dearest, I will overtake you; go."

"Not so, Jack, I stay; I would die with you."

"For God's sake, child, go! If you stay, you ruin all."

I turned and carried her over the crest of the hill out of sight. There, she flung her-

self from my back, face downward in the rough grass, and drew her mantle about her head, and lay like one dead, awaiting the end. It came.

My master scorned cover; I thought that foolish then; I still think so, but it was just like Jack. He advanced straight into their teeth; there, straight and motionless, he awaited them, and, when they came within hail, he threw up his left hand and called.

"Would the Senors speak with me?"

A rattle of pistol shots was his answer; leaden messengers of death met in air; two ponies galloped riderless and free. Truly it had been better for Valquez and Martinez had they not followed. The Old Don steadied the beautiful big black square to the front.

"For God's sake, Senor, don't shoot! For her sake I would not harm thee!" called Jack.

I shall never forget the look on the old man's face; it seemed dwarfed and distorted with passion, haggard with hate, but never a trace of fear or forgiveness.

"I'll slay you both," he hissed, through

"TWO PONIES GALLOPED RIDERLESS."— page 134.

clenched teeth, and his steadily leveled pistol rang.

I saw master wince as though hurt, but still, in even, passionless tones he spoke: "For her sake, then, take that."

The big black, riderless now, galloped like the others, free across the plain.

With mighty effort, tenderly, Jack raised the little Inez, and, with many a kiss on lips and cheek and hair he said: "Ride fast to the fort, my love, give this to the commanding officer, he is my brother; he will care for you for my sake, and thine. I will rest here. I am tired, so tired," and my poor, stricken, dying master leaned heavily on my neck.

The little woman sprang to the ground and, clasping Jack in her arms, replied:

"Rest here, dear heart, rest thus, I am not tired at all; Buck and you rest and sleep, I will guard you, and when you have rested, and it has grown cool, then together we will go to thy brother."

He once more pressed the little form to his breast in a long and tender embrace, saying: "For the love you bear me, go, go

quick; say to the captain, that at the great cottonwood, at the head of Wild Horse Draw, his brother lies; that is all, go!"

As he released her I saw a crimson spot on the soft shirt he wore. I saw a look of understanding pass between them. Her face froze hard with a look of horror and agony; it was whiter now than the face of one already dead. Without a word she sprang to the saddle.

How I covered that nine miles I never could remember. My knees were cut and swollen, my dry lips bruised and bleeding, where, in my exhaustion, I had stumbled and fallen, but I remembered the bay filly and our pony oath, that kept me to my work, and I went on and on, though blind and faint.

She pressed the packet into the hand of the sentry at the main gate. Loud and clear the sentry called,

"Corporal of the guard, main gate."

A squad of troopers, led by a stalwart young captain, swept past where I lay, half unconscious there beside the gate. They disappeared in a cloud of dust. I saw my

dear master never more; a few days later I saw the Senorita for the first time since we came. I had found a big bunch of fine guava grass, and my muzzle was deep down in this when I heard a voice behind me:

"Buck."

I had no need to look, to know she was there, for none other had the soft, tender, and sweet voice of the little Spaniard.

That one spoken word of hers caused a rush of emotions which set me all a tremble; there flashed before me the scenes of that last dreadful day; the death of the gallant red bay filly; the naked Apache, face downward, dead, in the salt grass; the three horses running riderless, their trappings ablaze with glittering ornaments, and then that last view of my master. The stricken look on his paling face, the effort to stand erect and speak steadily; the awful crimson spot, spreading, spreading, on the gallant breast.

I raised my head slowly, to find it within dear arms, kisses raining on my neck and nose. I followed by her side, her arm around my neck. We came to a small plat of ground, fenced with white pickets, within

which she threw herself upon a mound of fresh earth. Standing there at the gate I heard her sobs and moans.

The moon rose over the divide, a blood red moon, casting a weird light over the ghostly stones, standing there in military array. I heard her voice, shaken and broken with sobs and lamentations:

"Oh, my lover, my Jack, come back to me! I am but a poor little weak woman who loves you, whose heart breaks for want of you. I cannot be brave and strong like you, Jack! Is it bad for me to be weak and a coward, Jack? Come back, Jack, come back, and take me in your strong arms again; let me lay this little tired head again on your dear breast. How foolish I am. You cannot come to me, can you, Jack? There was blood on your breast. I will come to thee; God in heaven and all the saints forgive me what I do!"

Slowly, there in the red moonlight, she arose, and with her angel's face turned to the stars:

"Jack, father, mother, I come!"

I saw something flash there in the moonlight. The next day, close beside the one, another mound of fresh earth was heaped, there within the little plat behind the fort.

Reveille sounds, but it does not awaken the dear dead sleepers beneath the twin mounds there upon the hill side.

CHAPTER X.

ANYBODY'S PONY.

I was anybody's pony now; soldiers, women, children, anybody who wanted to, rode me whenever they wished. They called me "that old buckskin cow pony.

This made me tired, and I concluded that I would run away with the first outfit I could find which looked at all favorable. One day there came drifting past, a trail outfit which were moving about four thousand Mexican steers to the Northern ranges. First came a fringe of fast walking leaders, on each side of which rode a cowboy "pointing" them in the direction they wished the herd to take, and these were

followed by a widening wedge of cattle, until the crush at the tail of the drive, then behind these came the mess wagon, and, following, came the pony herd.

I knew that it would not do to join them during daylight, for they would cut me back, but I looked them over carefully and found them to be a fairish looking outfit, so I waited until night, then I took their trail. I hunted up the pony herd; quietly slipped in among them and made myself as inconspicuous as possible while they were catching horses the next morning, but passed unnoticed. I traveled with them that day, I now knowing that I was safe, and I mixed in as though I belonged there. I had been discovered, however, and they said:

"Rather a likely looking cow horse."

Next morning I was caught. They didn't seem at all put out at finding me in the "cavy," in fact, I have never known a cow outfit to be mad at finding that a good, sleek horse belonging to someone else had joined them.

Several of the cow boys wanted to add me to their strings, and I was finally taken

by an old fellow whose home was in Kansas City. He was the owner of the herd, but this was his first venture in cattle, and his first trip over the trail. He had one of the punchers ride me a short distance, to see if I was gentle; then he carefully climbed into my saddle. I say he "climbed" into the saddle, because he was so awkward about it. This is the way he did it. He seized my mane with one hand and the cantle with the other and slowly lifted himself up, the bridle reins all the time hanging to my knees. There wasn't the least spring to his movements, and he nearly pulled my mane out every time he mounted me. Now everybody knows that is no way to mount a cow horse. Mounting in the way he did, he had to let loose of the cantle before he could get into the saddle. Just then, if I had wanted to, I could have thrown him over the mess wagon. I thought he would make a good boss,, though, so I just grunted and stood still. Now a cowboy who understood his business would have taken the reins up taut, and would perhaps have taken hold of the cheek strap of my bridle with his left hand and the pommel with the right, and

"NEXT MORNING I WAS CAUGHT."—page 143.

swung himself into the saddle with scarcely a particle of side draft.

The old fellow was so afraid of me that he attempted no very active work. He was generally kind and agreeable, so I carried him the nicest I knew how, and we became, before we parted, great friends.

This was the scratchingest outfit I ever worked with. It was just scratch, scratch, scratch, the livelong day. At first I didn't know what the trouble was, but later I found out. My boss had in the wagon an enormous trunk, as big almost as a pony, and every evening he would get this out. The contents consisted of many suits of clothes, enough of everything, it seemed to me, for an entire outfit. He'd examine them carefully, and then whip and shake them as though he were trying to destroy them; then he would change clothes; wrap the old one up tight, tie them, and place them back in the trunk. I noticed that the old fellow's labors with the contents of the "old pie box," as the cow punchers called it, excited among them the greatest mirth.

The foreman's name was Bruce. One

day, riding beside him, my master said:

"Bruce, (scratch) this alkali dust is something awful; (scratch) it is getting into my very hide. (Scratch.) What is a fellow going to do about it?"

Bruce was a big, good looking, quiet fellow, whose loudest laugh was a silent smile. Now he didn't even indulge in this, but soberly answered: "Pick 'em off,—bile 'em."

I noticed that Bruce carried a smooth flat stick about a foot long and as he said this he reached up and thrust it down inside his shirt at the back of his neck and worked it about. After that my master carried a similar stick for the same purpose. As we put the slow miles to the southward of us, it was, every evening, whip, shake, pick, boil, until I came to imagine that I too itched and must do something. About this time we struck a gumbo country, and as I had no hands with which to pick, and didn't want to be boiled or whipped, and shaking did no good, I concluded that the best thing for me was to apply a good thick coat of gumbo plaster. A rain had recently fallen and the plaster was in good condition.

I found a favorable spot and took a good wallow in the greasy, pasty stuff, then when it had dried pretty well, I faithfully applied another coat. As a remedy against the assaults of flies, mosquitoes and vermin generally, I recommend gumbo, but it adds nothing to the beauty of a pony; it could not be called a beauty bath.

When I came into the ropes the next morning, I didn't look much like the sleek, smooth-coated Buck of the evening before, and the other ponies were laughing at me. When I heard the shouts of the punchers and saw the look on my master's face, I had to laugh too. I looked ridiculous. They called me "old rope tail," because my mane and tail were just ropes of gumbo.

My master was disgusted, and without a word he out with his knife and cut off the gumbo ropes. Had I known that such a result would have happened, I should never have taken that bath, for I was very proud of my silver mane and tail; everybody said it was fine. My master declared he would not ride such a scandalous looking beast, and turned me over to one of the punchers.

I felt pretty bad at losing my pretty mane and tail and at being turned down in the manner I was, but it came out all right in the end.

Master then took for his mount a little deadhead, black, night herd horse. As he laboriously proceeded to mount to his saddle, the little black, not being used to that manner of mounting shied and I had the satisfaction of seeing the old gentleman get a good tumble. The pony had, in fact, done nothing very wrong; he simply didn't understand that way of mounting. Nothing, however, could convince the old man that the pony had not bucked.

He wouldn't ride a bucker and so he took me back again, and a few days later we came to the Platte River at Ogalalla, Nebraska.

My master said that now he would curry me to a finish and he adopted a lazy man's method of doing it, by riding me into the water and came near drowning me; then he found a swimming hole and there he wallowed me about utterly regardless of my desires or feelings. If he had loosened my cinches, I could have done better, but with the cinches drawn tight it was a struggle to get breath

enough inside me to keep me afloat. When I was thoroughly washed off I was allowed to come out and I both looked and felt better, except for the mangled mane and tail. I tried no more gumbo baths while I was with them.

The old gentleman was an easy master. If ever he grew too frisky I had but to cut up a few capers and it was: "Whoa, Buck; now be a good pony, Buck." And again I was allowed to choose my own gait.

One evening soon after leaving the Platte I came near losing my life. The night herders had taken the herd and were trying to bed them down, that is, bunching them in a circle. There was one big red-spotted steer who seemed possessed of the spirit of some restless devil; he would neither lie down himself or allow the others to lie down, and whenever they attempted it, he would hook them into a state of agitated activity; then he would lead off, all the time bawling outrageously, just as though he smelled something which needed instant investigation by the entire herd.

Of course, there are in every herd a few fool cattle, and those in this herd would set up a responsive bawling and promptly spike out

after him. The night herders would, of course, promptly turn them back; then old red-spot would walk straight through the center of the herd goring everything within reach of his long horns, and attempt to leave on the opposite side. Bruce had been standing beside master and I for some time watching the antics of the old rascal, but he finally became disgusted with old red spot, and said:

"Let me take Buck and I'll tie the old devil down."

He mounted me and quietly drove the big brute out of the herd, shook out his rope and gave me my head. I knew what was wanted, and although the big steer was a fast runner, I was soon alongside of him. I hugged close to him so that Bruce could lay his rope over his head, for I knew it was useless to try to throw the rope very far and get the noose spread wide enough to take in those immense horns. They measured more than six feet between tips, I heard them say.

Bruce was leaning forward in the saddle, just about to catch him when the nasty brute threw his head viciously around in front of me, his long left horn swept clear past my breast and caught me in the side and I felt

it penetrate my body; then I thought my time had come. Just then I had the signal from Bruce to go and I shot past that steer, the rope meanwhile encircling his neck and dropping down about his haunches. I knew just when the end of the rope would be reached and I knew that the proper thing for me to do was to stop instantly when he was thrown, but I thought I was killed by the thrust of his horn. I was desperate. Instead of stopping I threw my whole weight, while running at full speed, upon the rope and I heard the big brute strike the ground with a grunt and also heard the sound of breaking bones. Bruce and I both knew that something had happened, and he threw the rope free of my saddle, something he would not have done had he not known that the animal was injured. There old red-spot lay, with ends reversed, his legs rigid and quivering. I had turned him completely over, and the neck, held awry by the long horns, was broken.*

I was led away into a watered coulee and turned loose; turned loose to live or die, as the fates might determine, but my ugly wound

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*Note.—The head of this mighty horned steer may be seen in the Butte County Bank at Belle Fourche, S. D.

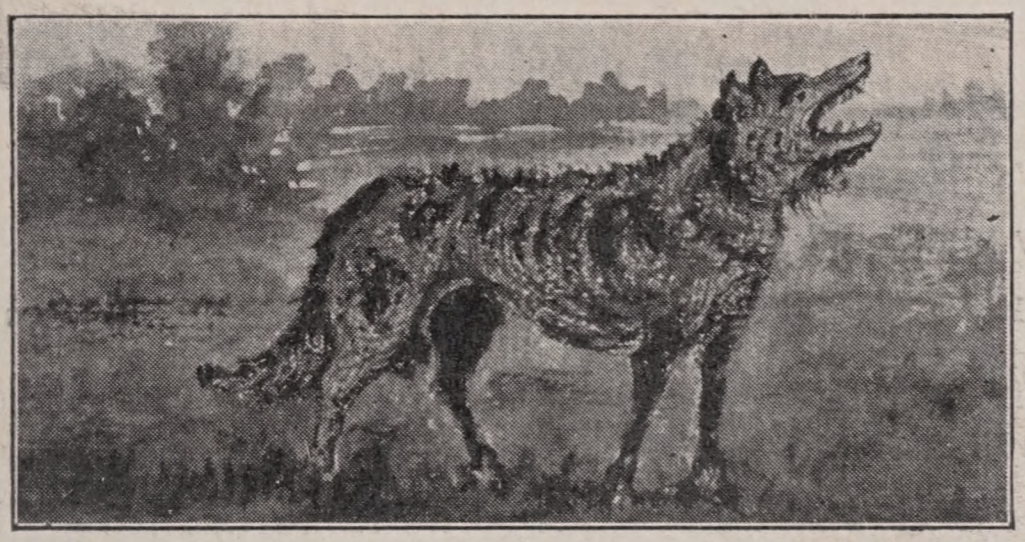
was first smeared over with "dope," which was nothing but axle grease.

Some one said that I would die, but Bruce remarked: "Not much, you don't kill a buck-skin cow horse that easy," and Bruce was right.

It almost broke my heart to see the outfit move on next morning. I made a painful effort to follow, but the blood gushed from the nasty hole in my side, and I was so weak I had to lie down. Thousands of blue bottle flies swarmed and buzzed around me. Coyotes and hoboes coolly looked me over, doubtless counting the days until they would devour me. I was, however, a big, strong pony and had often heard men say that I had a constitution of iron. I withstood the pain and the weakening effects of my hurt and slowly grew better.

Every day I wallowed in the mud, plastering the wound over; it healed rapidly under this treatment, and in a few weeks I was able to wander about and defy the impatient wolves.

They had waited too long. I was still sad and lonesome, and the thought that I was again "nobody's pony" hurt me more than my wound.



CHAPTER XI.

A Faithful Dog.

It would seem that a pony who had nothing to do and plenty to eat and drink ought to be satisfied, but it is not so. After a pony has been worked for years, association more or less closely with men becomes a necessity with him, and without the sight of his two-legged friends, he pines and is dissatisfied.

Having recovered so far as to enable me to hobble about, I had several times gone to the top of a high hill near where I had been stopping, and had looked the country over. I had seen no signs of people, and had about

made up my mind to emigrate, when I was overjoyed one morning to see a man working over the sparse remains of old red-spot. I at once made my slow way up where he was, and found that he was preparing the decayed carcass for wolf bait. He was piercing small holes in the carcass here and there, into which he was pricking little crystals which he carried in a bottle, and I noticed that he was careful not to touch the meat with his hands. When he had finished he dragged parts of the body about where his feet had been, and finally down to the water.

After he had finished, he came and looked me over carefully, and in the kindest and gentlest manner possible, washed and dressed my wound. This was the first time the wound had been dressed since I was hurt, and it felt vastly better when he had finished. He then rode away. The next day he came again, and after dressing my wound, plastered it all over with a black, sticky stuff which he called tar. He said it was an outrage to leave a pony in the condition I was.

Under this treatment I grew rapidly better, and was soon able to travel, slowly, of course,

but still so well that he led me away to his camp, which was not much of a camp, for it consisted of only a rickety wagon, a half-dozen ponies, guns, pistols, a few camp equipments, a little grub and a lot of snarling, hungry dogs. He also had a few wolf pelts stretched out, curing.

The man was a wolfer. His name was "Sam the Wolfer," or for short, "Wolfer Sam." I found his ponies an amiable lot and I soon made friends with them, and had a pretty good time for the next month or two, until I was well again. Wolfer Sam now began riding me on his rounds visiting his bait and traps, and it was on one of these trips that the incident happened which I am about to relate, and which gave me a much higher opinion of dogs than I had before.

We left camp about daylight, followed by one of the dogs, and had visited the last trap, which was some twenty miles from camp. We were about to return, when a big timber wolf sprang up and lumbered away across the prairie. I thought from the way the animal ran that it had eaten poison and I think Wolfer Sam thought the same. He immediately

gave chase. If the wolf had eaten poison, it had not yet taken effect sufficiently to make it stiff or to retard its speed, for it gave me a hard chase, but I was drawing up on it when, as ill luck would have it, it headed across a prairie dog town. I knew the danger of running across this, as the footing was treacherous, and at the speed I was going I had but little time to pick places for my feet. I believe, however, that I could have gotten across all right if Wolfer Sam had given me my head, but he jerked me off my gait; my fore feet broke through a thin crust, and down I went.

I was stunned and bruised, but I scrambled to my feet only to find the wolfer stretched out, stunned but cursing, one leg all awry. The dog was standing over him, whining and licking his hands and face.

The situation was serious. That leg refused to get into its normal position, and there was no help anywhere within many miles and no one to send for it if it had been closer. Wolfer Sam dragged himself over to where I stood, but the pain was so great that he did not try to mount me.

The day wore slowly away with no change

in the situation nor prospect of help. Night came on, the greater part of which was consumed by Sam in dragging himself to a pool of water which a recent rain had left on the surface. Morning came, but Wolfer Sam, worn out with pain and cursing, slept. I was glad of that. The dog, however, was gone.

As for myself, I was determined to stay by him to the end, and I thought it was close at hand, but that pestiferous dog. Pretending to feel so bad, whining so piteously, kissing the face and hands of his master, then going away as soon as darkness came. I pictured him at camp, rustling in the old man's chuck box for grub.

I did that dog a great injustice, and I apologize to him, for about nine o'clock that morning he returned. He was gaunt, and lame, and hungry looking; his feet were sore and full of cactus thorns; he made his painful way to his prostrate master and laid in his hand a hunk of bread, about half a loaf, and although it was saturated with the dog's saliva, the way that man ate it was a sight.

I want to be just to Wolfer Sam, also. There were many good things about him. He

gave the dog an even half of the bread, then put his arms about that dog's neck and kissed him and cried over him. The faithful animal would have put his arms about his master if he had arms, but as he had none he just licked the old man's face and hands and whined. I suppose that that is a dog's way of kissing.

I—but what is the use of telling what I did. I had troubles plenty of my own. My saddle had been cinched very tight and it was burning my back, and seemed eating into my very vitals. I started to gnaw the cinch, but I thought "suppose master should want to mount me, what then?" I determined to bear the pain, even though it killed me.

Master and dog slept. The dog's head pillowed on his master's breast. Thus those two unconscious of their own and my misery, lay hour after hour, sleeping. The hot sun beat down on them, birds twittered and sung while I stood guard, wondering what the final would be. At length the dog awoke, drank his fill, wallowed in the pool and left.

It was evening when he returned, and he was closely followed by two cow punchers. They came from a line riders' camp about twenty

miles distant, and I heard them say that when the dog first came to their camp, they recognized him as belonging to the wolfer, and seeing his famished condition, they gave him a chunk of bread, which, instead of eating, he took in his mouth and made off in the direction from which they had seen him come. This was the bread which the faithful animal brought, untasted by himself, to his suffering master. When he returned the second time, vastly to their surprise, he begged them by every dumb pleading of which he was capable, to follow, and at length, their curiosity being aroused, they saddled and followed.

The two examined the old wolfer, said his hip was dislocated, and that it must be pulled back into place. Old Sam said:

"Go ahead and pull the d— thing back into place or pull it off. I don't care a cuss which."

One held the body while the other pulled on the leg, but it was of no use; they were not strong enough, then one of them said:

"Look'e here, Old Hobo, down in Arizona, I saw a Navajo Injun's leg pulled into place with a horse; I got to do the same with yourn. No bucking, now, we've got the cinch on you."

Wolfer Sam replied: "All right, pull the dammed thing back or pull it off. Hitch on Buck."

Now, I didn't want to do this job at all; it looked brutal to me and I started to leave, but the old fellow yelled at me to stop and, of course, I did so. I then saw that I was in for it, but I made up my mind that I'd pull mighty slow and easy, for I was afraid I would actually pull his leg off, and I didn't want to do that.

They dragged the old man up to a box elder sapling and tied, by passing a rope around his breast under the arms, his body to that. They then attached a rope to the displaced leg; one of them mounted me, took a hitch on the pommel of my saddle exactly as though he were going to pull a heifer out of a mud hole, and:

"Steady now, Buck."

The other man sat down on the injured hip. Well, I did hate to pull, but I had to do it; I just leaned forward on the rope, harder and yet a little harder, then there was a soft sound as the bone sprang into the socket. The man at the hip yelled "Stop!" and the queerest sur-

gical operation I ever heard of was successfully accomplished.

I think that it must have hurt the old wolfer pretty bad, for while I was pulling, tough and gritty as he was, he let out some awful blood-curdling yells. He swore he'd kill the whole lot of us if he lived. After the job was done, however, and he was told that it was back in place and that he would get well, I saw a faint smile on the white old face. The question then was how to get the patient to camp. But a little thing like that don't bother a cow puncher or a wolfer very long, so they just rigged a travois about me, bound the old cripple on firmly and we slowly went to camp.

It was a hard time Wolfer Sam had for the next few weeks. He refused to leave his own camp, and was unable to take care of himself. His rescuers fixed him up as comfortably as they could, brought him water and fire wood, placed his grub and provisions as convenient as possible, and left him to his fate. Every few days they would call and leave a few days' provisions and depart again. His hurt, however, gradually grew better and

in the course of a few weeks with the aid of crutches and canes, he was able to hobble about.

Of course, he could no longer put out his traps or bait and he grew restless and determined to move on. With the greatest effort he managed to pile his few belongings into the old wagon and hitch up a team, then he hit the trail, and headed for the Black Hills, where he said he would market his pelts and have a good time.

He was a queer old chap, this old wolfer, and seemed always dreaming of something in the past. He was kind to his dogs and ponies and shared with them the good things which came his way; but it was few enough of those which make the lives of people desirable which the old man had. He lived, while I was with him, almost entirely on flapjacks and jack rabbits. If he had but two flapjacks he gave one of them to the pups. But the trails leading to the old man's heart were broad and straight, and to one in need he would give his dearest possessions. His unbounded generosity was well illustrated when, one day, near

Jenny's Stockade, we met a brother wolfer from the north.

From the look of the outfit he was down on his luck, was this new wolfer. His ponies were poor, his wagon wabbly and ancient; his skin was weather-beaten and tanned to the color of an old saddle. By his side, on the springless seat, was his wife, a young old woman, whose face even here, under these discouraging circumstances, showed traces of outlived beauty. It was haggard from care, grief and want. Behind them under the flapping and torn wagon cover, projected the shocky heads of children, a full half-dozen of them, I think.

The wagons, as they reeled alongside, slowly came to a full stop, and the following dialogue took place:

"Howdy, stranger?"

"Howdy."

"Wolfin'?"

"Yep. Whar' ye bin? What luck?"

"Bin up on the 101 range. Hard luck; no wolves, nothin' but coyotes. Cow boys killed all my dogs."

"The devil they did!"

My master had his dogs tied in a string behind the wagon, to save them from injuring their feet running through the cacti. He now slowly and painfully climbed out of the wagon, and going to his rearmost dog, a fine tan bitch, took his skinning knife from his belt and deliberately cut the dog from the string, then handing the animal up to the stranger from the 101 range, said:

"I pity ye if ye've lost yer dogs. I'll give ye this 'un for a start."

The stranger took the tan brute promptly, placed her between his legs, and as he stroked her head replied:

"Thankee, stranger, thankee. I shore did have bad luck up thar. One of my ponies died and another got locoed yesterday, and is back there at the stockade, crazy as a bed bug."

It was evident that the forlorn looks of the entire outfit, the loss of the dogs and pony, touched the heart of my master, for he cut off from the string a couple more dogs, and tossing them in among the children, where they were promptly seized and secured, said:

"You sure did have hard luck. Take these."

"Yes, that's so. I've had many a hard knock

and I've tried to stand up under it like a man and a wolfer, but I was shore nigh knocked offn my pins up thar. You see one of the kids done tuk sick; the old woman and I nussed and nussed her, but it done no good."

He looked away off the shimmery alkali plains; his lips moved but he did not finish the sentence. His wife, the hard lines on her face softening, and dew coming in her eyes, laid her hand on his brown, dirty and rough ones, and gently spoke:

"Don't feel like that, Jared, don't. We done all we could for her. It was the Lord's will."

"We done all we could for her, wife, shore we did. We guv her nothing but sage tea to drink all the time she was sick, but she just moaned like the wind through the limbs of a dead cottonwood, and pined and withered like, and at last——"

He gulped and swallowed, a moment, and then resumed:

"Well, we buried her all alone there, atop of Agate Hill; but somehow I can't help but think that the little thing still misses us an' the pups."

By this time tears had washed furrows down through the accumulation of dust and grime on my master's face, and with a quick stroke of his knife he severed the cord which connected his three remaining dogs to the axle-tree of the wagon, and placing it in the hands of one of the kids, said, broken and husky like:

"Take 'em; take 'em. Ye're more'n welcome to 'em. Take good care 'o that tan bitch; she'll give ye a good start in life. She runs by sight, an' she'll tackle anythin' that wears h'ar, an' them thar hounds'll chew 'em up."

Many a time have I, when disheartened and discouraged, had my heart and courage restored by kind words and a good feed of oats, and as I saw the faces of these unfortunates light up at this totally unexpected accession of wealth, I thought: "Is there, after all, so great a gulf between ponies and men?"

As the wagons rolled apart, I heard the thin quavering voice of the woman calling after us: "The good Lord'll reward ye, stranger, for yere goodness to us."

Near Jennie's stockade, sure enough, we found the locoed pony. He was no longer crazy; he was dead.

CHAPTER XII.

How Wolfer Sam Painted Deadwood Red.

We reached Deadwood after a hard trip over stony hills, tired, hungry and discouraged, Master's supply of jack rabbits was exhausted and he had been living on flapjacks straight. At the top of the hill above the famous town, which was strung out in the canon away below us, he stopped and took a good long look, hungering not only after grub, but also what he called "the flesh pots." He said, speaking to himself:

"Damme if I don't paint the old town red; that is, if the pelts hold out."

We made camp at the lower end of the town,

then he started us ponies off up the side of the cañon. Glad enough we were to get away, for the noise below was something dreadful. I have seen a thousand calves taken from their mothers at once, and have heard every one of the two thousand bawling until it seemed that they surely must split their throats, but I have never heard any noises equal to the uproar there in that cañon.

Railroad trains were rolling up and down, whistling constantly; smelters and mills hammered, pounded and roared until they drove us ponies nearly crazy. We rapidly made our way over a hill and down into a long, low, narrow, park-like place, where we found good feed, and where the sounds were broken and mellowed. When I was at the top of the hill, I looked back and saw our master with a great pack of pelts on his back, starting up town, where he was intending to sell them, after which, as he had said, he was going to paint the town red.

The next afternoon I saw, approaching, a gentleman who wore a blue suit and a star upon his breast, and he was leading a wabbly specimen of humanity, in whom it was difficult to recognize master. His clothes hung in tat-

ters from his lank figure; his face was bruised, battered and slashed; one eye was closed, and about his entire person was a look of utter disreputableness and dilapidation. He leaned heavily against my shoulder, his arms about my neck, and I felt the unstrung figure trembling. In a weak and shaky voice he said:

"Buck, don't try to paint this town; it can't be done; I tried it to a finish. I'm a pretty tough old knot, but just look at me now. No, don't look at me, I don't think I look very well. I had a good time, though, Buck, yes I did, until my skin money gave out, and then it was biff, bang, and the stamp mill; I think they must have run me through one of their durned mills about three times, and when I was done to a turn, along comes this fellow and toted me off to the calaboza, and he says I must pay a fine or work on the rock pile. I can't work, no I can't, can I Buck?"

The officer, a tall, slender, nice-looking man, stood listening, evidently sympathizing with Sam, whose distress touched even his heart. His sympathy was wasted however, for Sam turned on him.

"Durn ye, what ye looking so sober about? Is your pardner dead? Give me a lift."

He helped the old man to mount me, and we started up town.

We entered Lower Main street. Here the sidewalks were crowded by those who came forth to jeer at my fallen master; white, brown, red and black were represented in the motley gathering. Japanese, Chinese, Indian and white women, and mixed bloods of all these races, poured from the hovels which lined the street. From the looks and the talk of the motley array, I thought the street rightly named, the Main street, leading, however, down to perdition.

The old fellow sat uncertainly on my back, and it required care on my part that he did not fall off. He gave no heed to the gathering on the sidewalks, but said to me:

"Buck, this is the bad-lands, no, not the kind of bad-lands you know, not God's bad-lands, but the devil's. Your bad-lands may kill a pony, and his rider, too, but they die clean-souled and self-respecting; but these human bad-lands kill the soul as well as the body. Steady, Buck, steady, be careful, don't let those hackmen drive against us; I don't seem to see very well to-day, old boy; every-

thing is red, red like the bloods of the fools they murder here, and it has gotten into my brain; it is the paint, yes it is the paint I smeared the street with; it has colored my soul and is burning in my head; I can't see you, Buck; whoa, steady I say, I'm not well, Buck; I guess this is the end of my trail. I'll not paint any more, nor wolf either; it's dark, dark; good-bye, good-bye, I'm——"

The old hands clutched at my mane. He lay forward upon my neck and then rolled heavily and unresistingly to the cobble-stone ballasted street. A crowd quickly gathered about the body; words of sympathy were plenty. He was thought to be dead. One said "apoplexy"; another said "heart disease." That policeman, however, knew a thing or two. He said:

"Give him a drink."

Instantly a dozen hands flew to as many hip pockets. Now, down on the border where I had been raised, such a movement meant trouble, and instinctively I shrunk back. Instead, however, of a dozen guns being produced, each hand drew forth a black bottle.

I saw Old Wolfer's willing lips encircle the

neck of a bottle, I saw the throat action of swallowing, I saw out of his well eye an appreciative wink, and I knew he would live to paint other towns red.

The next morning I was owned by a fat, red-faced, big-bellied butcher, and I was taken by a boy, who rode me delivering meat to the butcher's customers.

Of all the work I ever did, this was the worst. It was canter, canter the livelong day; over the stony streets, up the sides of the hills, where it was so steep that I could scarcely scramble, then slide down, but ever under the whip. It was many a hard jolt I gave that boy, but he was a wiry little fellow and never complained.

I wanted a change of scene and labor. How to get it I didn't exactly know, but I thought that I would try and attract the attention of some one who would buy me, and when I was around where men were gathered I showed off all my prettiest gaits; I arched my neck, tossed my head, and champed the bit; I single-footed, paced, trotted square and cantered, at the will and pleasure of that kid.

I had noticed a rather respectable looking

MY NEW MASTER.

gentleman watching me, and when he called at the market and asked to ride me around the block, I was not surprised and I gave him the nicest ride I knew how. He bought me.

My new master rode me out to his horse ranch, and branded upon me the connected TU brand. Two years have passed since then, and they have been the happiest years of my life. I now hear men say: "Poor Buck, he is growing old."

What is it to grow old? Is it white hairs among the yellow? Is it shortness of wind and dimness of sight? Is it stiffness of muscles and shrinking of frame? If these be evidences of approaching old age, then, indeed, am I growing old. If these be the only compensations for my fourteen years of faithful labor for my many masters, then I may well say that my life has been unfruitful of rewards.

Nay, nay, growing old is not these alone. What, then, is it to grow old? It is to gain strength to trample under foot passion and hate, fear and frivolity. It is to grow generous and just; thoughtful of the rights and comfort of one's mates and masters, and charitable

in one's judgments of their vices and weaknesses. It is to broaden, and grow in love of pony-kind and mankind, with tears for the sad and hopeful smiles and words of encouragement for the broken-hearted and despondent.

It is courage, ever courage, never despair, when storms hide the trail and bewilder the senses and all beyond is hidden under a raven's wing. It is to find the heart stronger; it is to have the ability to look forward to the end without a sigh or a shrinking; it is to calmly and without fear, travel down the trail, at the end of which all the friends of all the years await the coming of wearly old pony, and weary old master.

And the end, what is it?—REST.

And so, dear pony, and dear master, touch noses, shake hands with the grim, old world, and smile.

THE END.

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